The Paris Review

116 $6.00 £3 50F

Maya Angelou, Mario Vargas Llosa Interviews
Georges Perec, Mona Simpson Fiction
John Ashbery, Catherine Bowman Poetry
Gertrude Stein Feature

TIGER

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"The one way of tolerating existence is to lose oneself in literature as in a perpetual orgy."

—Gustave Flaubert,
in a letter, 1858

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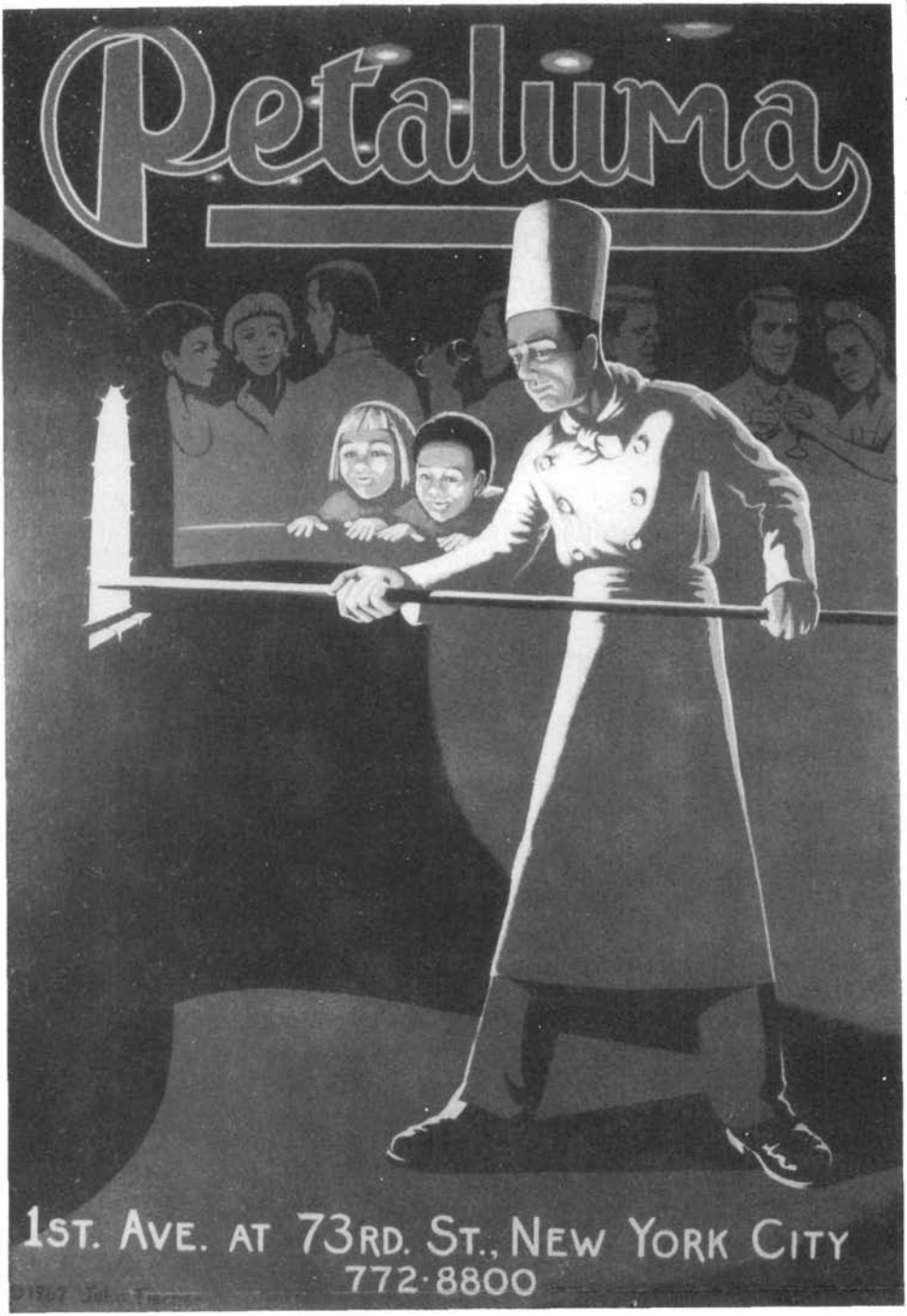

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The Paris Review is published quarterly by The Paris Review, Inc. Vol. 32, No. 116, Fall 1990. Office: 45–39 171 Place, Flushing, New York 11358 (ISSN #0031-2037). Paris Office: Harry Mathews, 67 rue de Grenelle, Paris 75007 France. London Office: Shusha Guppy, 8 Shawfield St., London, SW3. Distributors in the U.S.A.: Eastern News Company, Sandusky, OH. Typeset and printed in USA by Capital City Press, Montpelier, VT.

Price for single issue in USA: $6.00; in France: 50F; in the UK: £3. Post-paid subscription for four issues $20, for eight issues $40, for twelve issues $60, lifetime Associate $1000. Postal surcharge of $6.00 per four issues outside USA (excluding life subscriptions). Subscription card is bound within magazine. Please give six weeks notice of change of address using subscription card.

Fiction manuscripts should be submitted to George Plimpton, poetry to Patricia Storace c/o The Paris Review, 541 East 72nd Street, New York, N.Y. 10021. Manuscripts will not be returned unless accompanied by addressed envelope and stamps or international postage coupons.

Charter member of the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines.
This publication is made possible, in part, with public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts.
Second Class postage paid at Flushing, New York, and at additional mailing office.
Postmaster: Please send address changes to 45-39 171st Place, Flushing, N.Y. 11358.

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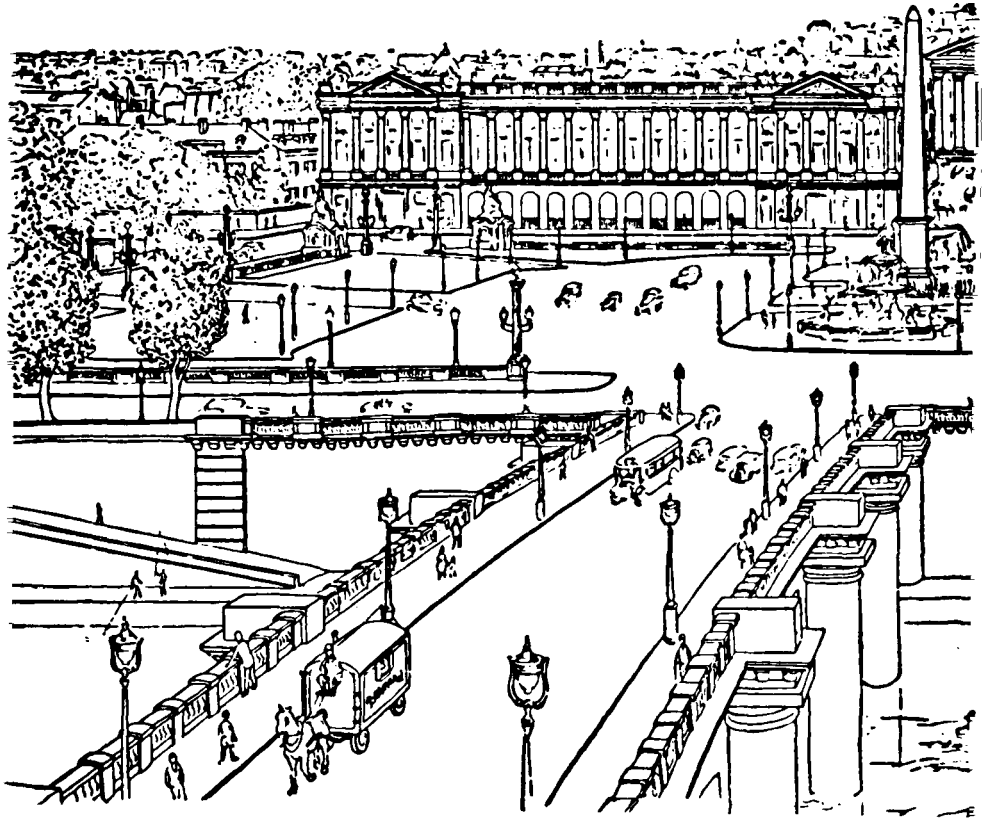

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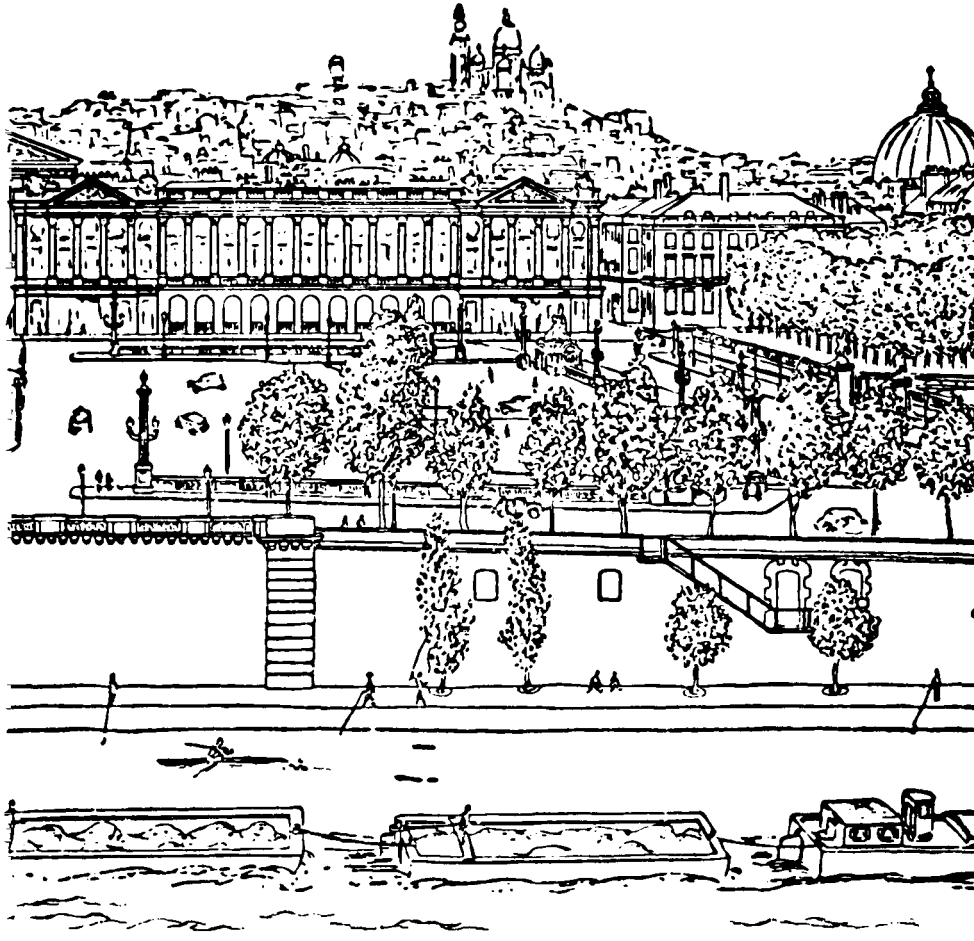

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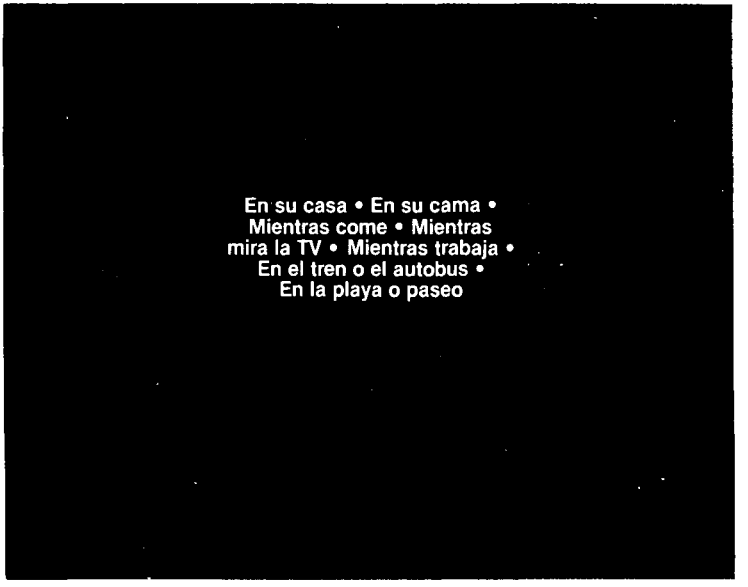

Frontispiece by William Pène du Bois.
Cover by Roni Horn, *Thicket No. 2*, 1990, ink on paper.
Table of contents illustration by Peter Halley, *Untitled*, 1986, kodalith print.

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I Am Here to Tell You It Can Be Done

Mona Simpson

Used to be, I was always saying, *This doesn't count.* I lived my life in secret, like if nobody saw, I didn't really have it. I was barely there. I wouldn't admit to a thing. Now I know that what humans observe and talk about is less than what I do alone, without live eyes on me. I want to tell you, don't believe what you've already heard about me. Believe this here alone. I'll tell you far worse than what they know. You see, I'm famous for the wrong reasons. The money girl. For nerving enough to say I care about other than money while I'm still making money. If you quit earning, they'll let you be as high holy as you want. I'm not famous for baking prayer bread, as if just bread weren't good enough for human gossip.

This doesn't count. I won't say that to you about us here today. This counts. For me this counts.

We don't really need this place, any of it, the nice light, they made the windows high so it waterfalls this time of day, the stone, cool, all these architect-made wonders. The first course

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I led like this, I ran it from behind the teacher's desk of a fourth grade classroom. All of you would have been sitting in rows in those funny little chairs, the men's knees knocking the bellies of the desk part, everybody's back out of joint. People just naturally folded their hands on those desktops, all ready to be ordered.

But it worked. Lot of people got help. Changed. In my office; I have an office, top of this church, in that square steeple, I always wanted a building with arches like we have here on top with nothing in the cutout part so you can see sky, on my wall, I keep pictures of every class. Some send me letters, you know, where they are, just what they're doing.

They send presents sometimes. And I'll tell you one funny thing about this course. You know how you get presents you don't like and your first thought is, what can I do with it, how to get rid of it? Well, every present I've ever opened from somebody who knew me here like this, was right. No other way to say it. Just right. You're all going to know each other that much.

I get to feeling like any old teacher. Cept I'm not old. Twenty-five still. But you age fast in religion. You're the Baby Baba and then you're just one of the cons. If you live. Or else you take the institution way. You teach at Harvard, Columbia or Berkeley, on one of those hills. Everything's hush-hush there. You don't hear many souls. Just buildings. Or the mish path. Learn a language with Berlitz tapes and then take a steamship to save the other people. I think we've got enough trouble right here.

You all came today. Big group. Maybe you saw an ad, the brochure, maybe you heard about it on TV, from somebody you know, but you filled out your form, and got here on time this morning to this church. You paid your good money. Thank you for it. I know I am not cheap.

But I am here to tell you that you made no mistake. I am no fraud.

I am somebody who came back from the other side. And I don't mean from life after death. I mean from the dead in life.

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My name is Dawn. I took it for myself when I ran away from the minister's family I'd been warded to and came out here to our state. I didn't know then that I'd be making sermons myself. I thought I was just another runaway orphan on a greyhound bus out of hell with my last baloney sandwich from home in a brown bag wrinkled up between my feet.

When I turn thirty, I'm changing my name again, to Star Duke. From morning to evening. I was born in Missouri. Baptized Dorothy Ann Maria Matsky.

We have an order to this class. You're going to live here, in the new dorm, for seven days. We will have Confession, Fasting, Penance, Conversion, Communion, Gospel (mine and a little bit from everywhere), and Prayer.

My church is a school. I always liked school, I felt safe in it. But then, too, the studies always seemed beside the point. The real problems never got whispered while we scribbled away with soft pencils solving abstractions on blue-lined paper, so thick so you could still see the wood in it. Where I lived was a papermill town.

Most of you, going on your shoes and the way your hands fold on your laps, look like working people who saved good money to come here. You can tell a lot from people by their shoes. Shoes and handbags. My two aunts taught me that and they meant for money. Cul-lass, they would say. They meant you can tell who's rich. I say, you can tell who is good, who is false, what lies they tell, what they try, how they manage, from a shoe and how a person wears it. An old worn shoe can be a beautiful thing, like a body that's been made to shape by its soul.

Who've we got here today? Lot of women. Always. The women make less money in this world but it's the women who can scrape up the dollars, save, scrimp, it's the women who go to the therapists, it's the women who buy the books, all trying to improve their lot and their lot is usually some man. That's not feminist. That's fact. And a lot of you women probably're down about love. Well, we'll get to that too. All in its turn.

And some men, I see. Of color, most of you. You seen some too, I know that.

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Never too many white men in my course, but a few of you, I count what, four, five. I commend you. Commend anyone who cuts out of his herd. We had one man, he sent his secretary here. Let me tell you something. You can't get nobody to do your soulwork for you. That's one activity you cannot delegate. I sent her packing right back to her typewriter. She didn't want to go. He'd instructed her to take notes, she said. He wouldn't like it, her coming back early.

Well, I'll tell you now, you can start thinking about relaxing, because your days of drugs are over. Your days of drink, your days of gambling. I had a lifetime gambler in here and he stopped, like that. Smokers we get all the time. They don't use anything. They just quit. I'll have you done with meat too before you go back out there. You'll crave a nice plate of rice and beans with Tabasco and vinegar.

Lot of programs, lot of therapists, they'll say to you, There are no guarantees. I give guarantees.

I know it's not easy to listen to a young preacher. The freckles don't help.

A couple of you probably came here today because of religion. And most of you are here because you know I'm a woman in business. And you want to figure out how to build up what I did. That's all right. Don't have to feel bad about it. I know that's the hook, okay, I use it too. So you don't have to sneak around about what you want.

The first year I was in business, I made one million dollars selling Prayer Bread in shopping malls. Two dollars a loaf. I opened one store and I worked. Then it was two, then ten. I brought my bread hot to that banker who wasn't going to give me a loan. I was waiting outside the door with the bread in a basket when they came with their keys in the morning. I will tell you step by step how I made my first million dollars, which unlike a lot of religious leaders in the state of California, I did not spend on myself. I don't save it either. I spend it. On this.

I don't have no fancy house. Nuh-uh. You can see my home. It's here, down outside, the stone cabin. On this property. I

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maintain, I will tell you, exactly twenty-five thousand dollars savings. I drive a new but mid-priced car. American. Ford.

There is something you can get from me, not like money, and it will last.

Most of what you've learned already won't work in this world. Else you wouldn't be here. And most of what they taught you, you didn't even know that they were teaching you that then and you sure as hell didn't know why. They were teaching it because they wanted you to be a certain way. Not for your own good like they told you. That's why we have so many falldowns.

You'll notice these days—especially here in our state, there's help for everybody for their everything.

If you drink, you can go to a meeting with alcoholics, any hour of the day, starting every fifteen minutes to the hour.

And with drugs. Same with gambling, eating, sexual problems.

There's groups and groups and groups. And you can talk and talk and talk about drink and drugs and dependency and whatever.

As if all anybody can ever be is what happened to them.

You notice a lot of people who went through some of what I went through, you went through, who had the same things happen to them—they take those outside garments and they go and make a career out of it.

Women whose husbands beat them, they go and be counselors to other women being beaten up. The incest people write books about being the incest people. The handicapped spend their lives in jobs trying to prove that being handicapped is no handicap. It all has a sad quality, like trying too hard, because why not just take that as given truth and be something else, like a gardener, or a lawyer. Alcoholics, the same thing, well you all know. The rape girls.

I myself didn't want to be no counselor. I didn't want to write down about what happened to me. I didn't want to be any social worker.

I wanted to be what I would have been otherwise.

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I wanted to be what I would of if the bad hadn't happened.
I wanted to get back what I was before.

And I want that same for you.

I want you to be what you're meant to, from the start.

Now let me sit down and tell you how the world made my outside. The what happened to me part.

First of all, there is no such thing as pure. Ain't nowhere. There is good. And that's about as much as you're gonna grasp in this life.

There is no such thing as pure. I wasn't even back then—before. Though I started out lucky, grew up back of a store with my mama. My daddy was long gone but what did we care. We had more than enough. You never are hungry living back of a store, and for special memories, we had delicacies come in trucks from far-away cities. Fancy papered jars and cans. In the Midwest in those days we had fancy Chinese oranges packed in syrup.

And the world was jungle. Everything smelled. The leaves in the morning gave a fresh tart taste so it almost hurt. I learned God way back then and had planted in me my calling. Prettinear every day, I went down to the river where it was all mud with the neighbor boy. I took a big glass jar—this jar was the pride of our kitchen, this one jar, olives had come in it, from Europe—it was so big and shaped and thick good glass but my mama still let me take it down to the river to catch minnows in the muddy shallow.

We kept going and it was a long warm day on one or the other side of summer and we walked into a baptism by the great Reverend Arthur B. Sands Gray. He is the man that day who dropped the seed in my heart that later grew into my profession. He didn't have to plant much. The hole was already there. He just dropped the word in and flicked some soil over it light, like—with a fingernail.

It went on a long time, his baptism there, and first the neighbor boy and me lagged back on those muddy banks. I had a sack dress, no underwear, no shoes, nothing, but I was all browned colors same as the water. The neighbor boy had britches cut halfway down his calf and he was pale and got lit-

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tle pink bites all over him. The Reverend had a close group of six or eight but they were decent grownups dressed in clothes that were the colors they started as, they held their little shoes in their hands. He preached to them but more and more he kept glancing up at us kids clinging with our hands and feet to the cottonwoods.

You kids know you're gonna die, he shouted.

You kids understand you poor?

People gonna tell you wrong things all you life, people gonna try make you believe you wrong and if you let them you're gonna curl up and grow in funny like toes in a bad shoe.

They gonna try and stunt you.

Is no such thing as justice in this here world and they not going to see in you what I see in you through them grey and green eyes today.

The neighbor boy squatted down pouring out river water with the guppies bellying desperate down the slow red banks.

Most of you probably don't know rivertime. There are different things you come to feel about religion if you grow up around a river not an ocean. When I first came here and I became Dawn and I was fifteen I got off the bus with my duffle and it was Santa Monica and I walked down to the pier and on the sand and into the water and the water was like nothing I'd ever seen—that color. And it was big and it came leaping at me like dogs and it was clear and it was clean.

I stripped my clothes down to the bottom peel and left my everything including money hidden in a split between the sole of my shoe and went in. I remember those waves coming up around my bare hips all foamy like a shower or a co'cola but blue a color the only thing I'd seen like that before was an eye.

Rivertime is different: water is brown, plainer than you can imagine here. Bushes that grow by the sides, blooming on top, smelling delicate in wind, riverplants stay the same, mile after mile. And a dirty slime gag pulls under like the mineral in shit, the half of vegetable rot. The day goes on longer. You do get time. We went baptized that day and the Reverend told us we would never die now, no matter what they did to us, we

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could live always, they couldn't take away our eternity. We would get ours after. Somewhere else.

And when he pushed my head down in the water he pressed something sharp and pointy in my hand.

Keep you own self dignity. Mind you soul.

That was what he said that day when there was time for everything. The neighbor boy and I, far down the river in a shade ditch, under dizzy willows, took our clothes off, the one thing we each had and lay with our bodies matching leg by leg, knee facing into knee, chests pressing. We were the same length exactly.

We figured out the beginning of the world ourselves. No one had told us yet. Everything there, the trees gathering and rippling above us, the river sound, a spring rise smell and its backyank under, all was still. But he pushed against me and stopped as if the fabric of my dress held it back, but I had no dress it was skin and then he raised himself up, I swear so he was levitated off the ground balancing on me, like an acrobat in the air held by one baton jabbed on a taut trampoline, and then I broke and he fell down, my hand clutching the thing in my fist, we fell through such hot pain. But then he moved again and the pain tunneled, it was different. My other hand, not the one holding the sharp thing the Reverend gave me, settled on top of his butt, a hard place, light skin over bone, I thought then and do now, the most arrogant place in a man.

Then I convulsed. I didn't know what it was but I didn't know what any of it was, it was us a way we hadn't been before. First my mouth filled with water, then I looked down and the bodies of us were moving I couldn't tell which was me and which was him and then for a moment after it was like fire went out from where we joined and I felt his thighs and my thighs both, my body went ahead far beyond me, ran away, like two dogs along the water and when it came back—it seemed like minutes later—I had light inside.

My fist was still closed over whatever it was the Reverend had put there. On my left side sat the empty glass jar. For a moment when our bodies left and ran away like dogs just running

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fast and greedy on mud, I'd see the glass go different, all its cells, a crystal honeycomb but still clear and the leaf next to it opened thick.

But then I was back in gravity. I felt the weight of his leg on mine. And when I turned the jar was still honeycomb but filling with gold yellow, a liquid light and I knew that was the Lord emptying himself into my soul just pouring at the moment we discovered the stickiness on us. I took some with a finger and tasted. It was like milkweed milk. We ran to the river and went in, just floating there, try-hard messy swimmers the same as always. Those days they never taught kids to swim, you just beat around in the water, praying. I switched the sharp thing to my other hand.

We were at a age when it amazed us what could be made in the world out of free other things. We had made milkweed milk.

When I finally opened my hand that night, I saw it was a pop bottle top, painted on the inside gold, with a little picture of Jesus pressed in. It'd made cuts in my hands and my mama took my palms in her lap and saw the little stars of dried blood and said, Girl you scare me.

I lost my right eye to that river before I left Missouri. I was flop-legged over an innertube, got caught in rapids and cottonwood branches—thin little pointed ones, red-tipped—scratched my eye out bloody as a raccoon would.

That's why my eyes don't match. When we were in the store picking out, where they have all the parts of the body, I picked violet, I didn't want it green like the left.

Then my mama died—tumors—and that was the end of my good childhood. Twelve-years-old and I had to pick. I had two aunts up in the Twin Cities, live-together spinsters. They would've taken me. But I chose for my profession. The young minister in town had been promoted to a new parish in Iowa and he and his wife and girl took me along. I thought I'd learn.

And I did. Some. Sunday mornings the man made an ora-

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cle. It was a white church with a white steeple over miles and miles of combed perfect corn. He set the pews trembling. Full of farmers. I knew what the backstage was like, the sink, with his comb in the cup and Listerine on the ledge, the ironing board, where he kept the Band-Aids. I lived there all of four years. I learned some miracles, small ones. The border between trick and miracle is thin.

He went and drank Saturday nights in his so-called ceramics workshop down the basement. He went, Going to work on the wheel, Mother. He always called his wife mother. She called him father to him and us. I never saw him make very much of clay. Liquor was a bad magic thing in him. He came back late, walked to my room, and opened me up, like fingering through the middle of a flower. His breath poured me in bitter. I felt the inside of me stretch to fit him, organs crowding. I never felt the trembling. I never convulsed. I never confused his with mine. I knew exactly what sticky stuff was him, what was me.

Sunday morning, he'd be waiting bottom of the banister to take us all to church. I don't know if he remembered a thing or not. But he had a perfect daughter. Sarah. She was younger than me but just as tall. She had long blonde hair, grey eyes, everything right. She had one of those heads and bodies like made on a lathe. From every angle, you looked and it was even. We wore the same size dresses, and when the mother bought her new, I got the old.

Pretty soon then I started ministering myself. They billed me, THE PREACHER'S PROTÉGÉ, and at one October corn roast I lectured fifty people about loss and gift, and at the end I took out my eye and showed.

After that he and I started fighting and it ended up him hitting bad. He beat me up underneath the kitchen table. That was more alive than his Saturday nights. Our fights flashed with gold and ardor. I hated him for blood. The first night it happened, next morning on my sheet I found a smear of brown. That was from me. I knew. I threw away the pop top from the old Reverend, buried it in the ground under a hick-

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ory tree. By then I was twelve and knew about hymen. But I figured I'd lost all that a long time ago.

If I'd known I still had it I might of done more.

That Sunday morning I was in the bathroom before any of them for an hour with soap and that sheet scratching it out of the fabric with my fingernails.

Then I did the worst thing I ever did in my life and I'm going to tell it to you now. Later on today, I want you to start touching for that—the true worst sin you have ever done. Your first assignment for me here is to go to your room tonight and find the worst thing you ever done. You're going to tell them aloud here to each other tomorrow morning. You'll be close to each other forever. Your second assignment's going to be a wish, called What I Never Got in My Life.

You cannot be clean until you show the dirt. It is part of knowing somebody. It is communion, with the Lord and with anybody here.

I don't now how far ahead I planned. I know Saturday nights I started wearing an old flannel nightgown and covered my face with white cream thick as Crisco. I kept my hair back in a tight bun, full of pins. I had a kerchief compress over my eyes. I made out that this was all for my night sleep restoration beautification, but I thought at first it'd keep him away from me.

But nothing did.

I kept slapping on the cold cream and tying the kerchief. I started talking to Sarah, about consummation with the angel. I told her I left my window open Saturday nights and God's own angel, maybe God himself came into me, filled me, ravaged me, tickled me with feathers, blew on me, filled me with exquisite blooming light, everywhere under skin.

Go on, she said.

In those days there, you saw traveling holy people. They came through town, sold their relics and left. Autumn and spring, they stayed in our house. These things happened to them all the time. Holy spirits made them get out of bed and kneel on all fours. They groaned while spirits sucked, drinking

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from their souls and blowing up into them, wind scraping up all their orifices with celestial sand.

At night I'd lie on the floor of her room and slowly describe the angel's sweet ministrations.

I could feel her limbs move itchy on the bed in that first shrill of yearning.

It took a month or so but finally Sarah told me—she wanted to taste the angel too.

That Saturday night I got her ready. I stripped her and dressed her in my room. I remember it was an October night, blowy, the trees outside black and dry, ticking the walls of the house. Light was far away and deep orange. I put her in my old nightgown that I always wore. I made her hair like mine, bunned and pinned. I put the cream on thick, tied the blindfold. The hardest thing was getting her to take her underwear off. She was one of those girls that put fresh panties on to sleep. I turned her around like for Pin-the-Tail-on-the-Donkey. The day before I'd snuck down to the basement and stole three thimblesfull of whiskey in a waterglass. I wanted her deep asleep.

I stayed awake in her bed, flat up, waiting. It seemed later and later. I worried about moonlight. But there was a scarce October moon and the stars, though sharp, were small. It was black. Late, finally, I heard his footsteps climbing to my door. then the door closed. He was in. I didn't dare go listen. I was scared to leave the bed. It was dark, my door was closed. I thought if he ever caught me he would kill me and he would be right.

Nothing happened for a long time. I went through everything, alone, face up in that bed. I couldn't hear a sound. I knew what everyone knows once at the worst when they have done something this bad and cannot stop it anymore.

I half expected them to discover each other and both come out and kill me. I half wanted that, but it stayed quiet.

A long time later I heard him walk out and I heard him clear his throat and cough, the same way he did when he left me each week. He went down to the kitchen sink, washed his

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hands and gulped a glass of water. Sometimes in the morning, we found bits of silver clay in the metal sink. He told us that was porcelain.

I heard him take his shoes off before he went in his own bedroom.

I wanted to rush in and see Sarah, make sure she was alive, I felt like sisters now, I only loved her. But something strapped my limbs down to the bed. I didn't sleep at all that night. Hours later, but still before light, I heard her in the bathroom. Then I got up and listened outside the door and I heard the fingernails scratching on cloth like I had done.

I opened the door. Spikes of light bounced off the tiles. Her face hung flat and older, laundry on a line.

That was my father, she said. He used us. There was no blame in it. I guess she still thought I believed he was an angel.

I wondered when she knew. Did she look down and see the same trash biscuit colored skin that had made her, part her? I didn't know. I never had a daddy.

Could he tell you knew?

I saw his ring, she said.

That is it. My worst thing I ever did. Later on, I found something like this in the Bible too. And then for a while I felt better. For a long time I used to feel better about things if it happened in the Bible. Don't laugh. It was written down, other people read it too. I have heard since of kinds of people who have sacrificed themselves for years but turned steel and hero to protect a little sister or brother. But not me. I was not that good. I wanted him to spoil his own the way he'd spoiled me.

And I got my due. I had a child stuck on the inside blood wall of me, growing, and this was the worst that was done to me. When they found out, they locked me in the upstairs garage room all day, no more school, after five months when I showed. There was no toilet in there. They gave me a black-painted chipping pail, dent-bottomed, that had been for picking cherries. I number-twoed in that. For number one, I had the glass jar from my home. All those four years I never heard the minister's wife talk about bodies as anything but number one and number two. Shelley, her real name was.

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I had a bed in there and a year's worth of Ladies Home Journals, which I read again and again, especially the recipes. The bucket in the corner. Him coming in and out. He was the only one besides his wife with a key. Me climbing the ladder up the web of light.

They took away the baby. It was a boy. They gave him away through something Christian, I don't even know what city, what they said for his name. And then as soon as I could walk again, I left. The day I went to the bus station with my duffle, I passed Sarah outside the high school. She was a bad kid now. She just stood there, her hair darker, with oil on both sides of her nose, her skin not clean anymore, ashes from her cigarette just dropping on the thigh of her jeans.

My first job here was waitress in the Venice New Day Cafe. Old-fashioned original health food. Vegetarian without too many vegetables. A lot of things with sprouts and melted cheese. Lots of peanut butter and heavy, heavy bread. Everything sopped with oil. I joined the church. And a couple there, took me with them to the valley, Sherman Oaks, I could live in their house, go to high school. I was behind but not that much behind. And that's when I met my first love. I knew the day I sat across from him in the MacDonald's dallying with my hair. I thought I'd found the Lord again and this time I was gonna marry him.

I worried all that day what he'd think, I had no family, nothing, I wasn't good enough. And then I found out his mama was blind. And I knew. I had him. We both went to school, they had me over to their house, everything. They even got me a tutor so I could learn tennis, so I could be up to him in doubles. I lucked out. I'd found one of the richest boys in Encino.

Love, in my life, was not my own doing. There I got help. I needed it. And it came to me, luck, like an angel.

I started out falling that time in high school and went on right through college and after. I fell and fell and fell. And always, it grew, a long painful thing.

I seemed to be a hard one to love. Even now, I am not sure why. I've got some ideas. But it is very difficult, ever, to know

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yourself the way other people can. You see yourself better and worse. There are some people who just find themselves the center of great many affections, the core of a flower with numberless petals. I studied those girls, not being one of them. The boys too. There were boys like that also. I knew. I was always one of those hundred petals ringing.

They did have some characteristics, I gathered. They kept something for almost everyone, gave a compliment, a gentleness, just a slowing down, a hand someplace. They took time for a lot of different people. They didn't pick one and knock over life in a straight line to that person. No. They weren't like that at all. They were softer meanderers, spread-palmed, seeing just what the world put in their way.

Maybe a long time later I tried to be like that but not at first. Anyway, you can't try so hard to be different with lists and all. Won't work.

If I liked a guy enough, I got ashamed. I couldn't hardly look straight at him. Talk, if I did at all, went nasty. That was bad.

And the first one lasted all my twenties. A guy named Ricky S. His house at home literally had a white picket fence with each picket pointed in an upside down V. This is what our dinners consisted of: a protein, a vegetable and a starch. The three different-colored things on a plate that had ridges to separate the compartments. Every time. But he had other women. He always did.

My aunts in the Midwest, never-married women who maintained a hat closet, educated me to believe you could always tell a woman's wealth by her accessories. They sent me gifts so I could up myself a little, look like more than I was. I've always made a point of wearing cowboy boots and sneakers, plain joke belts and leather backpacks.

I never wanted to fool nobody.

I was poor. You grow up poor to the age of fifteen, you always poor.

You get so . . . you wanna be.

My name is Hungry. I said that once at a dress-up party when somebody asked who I was. Oh-oh, the person said, and

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what is your occupation. I said, real loud, I'm a preacher. My date then was Ricky S. and we'd had a fight. Can't you just say you're in school studying theology, he'd been saying, Come on, you weren't exactly poor, your family was in business in Missouri, they did well. If they'd been here, in California, they would have been California-prosperous. It's just a different scale.

He was the last of my spiritual loves that would not work in this world. Marriage is a way different thing.

Parties like that one, I couldn't survive in. When I feel slave I have to get out.

Biology made him love me, finally. It was the teacher. Mr. Glinton, Ricky's original god. But he took a liking for me. I used to go into his office hours and he kept me for as long as I wanted. I sat different ways in my chair. With Ricky, I used to worry what he saw. I'd sit the way I thought made me best. I wanted him on my right side, with my good eye, I didn't want him overemphasized on my calves. But with Mr. Glinton, I just didn't care. He always smiled when he saw a certain new part of me, as if he liked it all, the full and roughnesses.

He got me to tell all my stories, my whole life. He knew way more than anybody else did. And then he tinkered, toyed with Ricky's heart. He reached in and adjusted things a way I never could have, but he did easy, without any trouble. He said to him once, You'll be in love with girls like Dawn when you're older, but you can't really understand her now. She's too much for you.

After that Ricky looked at me twice always, the second time to check, a little scared.

I wanted to be one of those people who gets what they want easily without asking.

I wasn't one.

That was a mistake to want. Mr. Glinton helped me with more than just Ricky S. He made me understand, when you fall in love with somebody, it isn't them. You fall in love with world. That's why I wasn't attracting and people like Ricky were. They grew up in that house with that family and protein and vegetable and starch and everything. I was just on my own.

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I started to look at the other people around campus and see, yup, she's got world, he has it, he's carrying it. Ricky S. had world orbiting around him. Mr. Glinton had world. So even my own love wasn't pure. I stopped believing in the possibility of perfection on the earth. And that was the first moment I began to learn how to live. Everyone here is beloved, yes, but only so much. Mr. Glinton tried to show me step by step how to add my own world around me.

The thing was, I had time.

That is all old.

I am here to tell you that it can be done. I changed. What you see here now . . . is new.

You over there?

You know a lady who acts everyday like a man left her yesterday and she was shattered like a clay pot in pieces on the floor? And then you find out it was twenty years ago? That was me.

And you, you know somebody who's got these big ideas but just don't have the confidence to see it all through. Don't ever finish any one thing? That was me.

I'm gonna write down four words: WOULDA COULDA SHOULDA and SORTA. Words we are going to learn to erase out of us. You're going to be DOING every day by the time I'm done with you.

I'm not much interested in punishment. I've done too much wrong myself.

I want all this out here in our group. Everything you did bad. You will be close forever to this group.

See, I am here for my son. I hope my child will walk into one of these courses someday. He does not need to know who I am to him. He does not need to recognize me. I just want him to recognize God. And that's what I can do for you. I can touch you to God. Make that introduction.

My born name was Dorothy Matsky. I have already built ninety-two shelters in this state. I have furnished three schools with libraries and my congregation numbers three thousand, not counting TV. And there'll be more.

Nobody is doing what I am doing.

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I'm weird. I'm weird for my age and for here, for California, and now I'm weird for my profession.

At the bottom of each of you, there is a picture of you failing. And I want to tell you something. That is one beautiful picture. Yours over there, yours may be a laugh rising up from a back porch with your old gramma, a laugh about how you were gonna make it someday far anyway, even though you didn't get those queenly things you thought of, jewels and all, when you were a little girl. For you there, it might be lying down in some field with the weeds higher than your face with your lost dumb brother, just slowing your time down to him, like a clock running out of winding.

You have a choice. And tearing that picture in half, letting that paper flow and frill in the water, I guarantee that will be the hardest choice you will ever make in your life. Whether to live in this life or the next. To be the one or the many.

God is not a social worker. He is too big for that. Too diffuse. How do you know he is alive at all? You will know. You can always tell if you pay attention.

Okay. Now. That's all right, let her leave, that's fine. One's not bad.

Some never understand: Bread is religion. That's what all the journalists miss. If you just make money, they leave you alone. If you want to give it away, you better be pure perfect. I mean do you see them going after Mrs. Fields? No, cookies they get. But bread is too mystical.

Now, I've got one more confession to you all. I might have lured you here with some kind of trick. I know, a lot of you are here, thinking now, well what's she gonna do for us? How's she gonna change me?

And I'll tell you how. It might not be the way you want. It's not the straight way, it's not the short way.

You are probably thinking, she got from A to B, from poor nothing country girl to millionaire, you're probably thinking, well I can bake too. But I am not going to teach you how to get to B.

B is nowhere. B is another A. There are more and more destinations beyond it and the ambitious heart is always hungry.

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I want you to forget B and meet God.

I will help you arrange the meeting.

All you need to live this life, is food and light.

I cannot give you the light because I do not own it. I could not even give you B if I wanted to, I have B because I do not need B, I do not want B, B is beside the point. It is only safe to be famous if you'd rather not be. The best way to be rich is to be rich not for long.

I can help you with food. Starting today, we will fast and after three days, we will break bread together on our knees, I can give you food and I can help you empty yourself for the Lord, sweep the room that holds the chair of your soul.

The Lord does not want your money. He wants yourself. Your whole love. It is like jumping off a cliff and falling in love with a person.

I can tell you how I found God. I didn't. He found me. I did nothing. Twice I was ready to die. The first time was underneath the minister's kitchen table. He'd beat me blind again, I guess you'd call it unconscious. And I felt that tinny tinkling of noise above as the world began again, the minister's wife's shoes shuffed the ground, a tin frypan hit the stovetop and I closed my eyes and felt, ENOUGH. I did not want to live. To rise up again from under that cover of bruised blackness, each time from unconscious, I had to work and I didn't want to work anymore. One spark of my calling, my vocation—this, stuck in me, like a safety-pin in skin reminding. But I decided no. Let somebody else do it. I was not going to be what I been before. I had not been given enough in the world to get by. Let somebody else do it. That spark snagged but it was one of point of light. The other won. In everything, there exists in small measure, its exact opposite.

I closed my eyes and decided to let myself die. I just lay there and the sounds around the kitchen grew faint, they were still there, I heard people walk around the table, a drawer opened, but they were very faint, like noise from a volume turned down TV, the sounds of another world.

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BUT I DID NOT DIE.

He saved me.

Each of you will meet him in a different way. You over there, you will meet him timidly. You will have a shy meeting, just like you might meet somebody important in your life, still even though it's quiet and private you know all the time that it matters, the silence doesn't make it matter any less. You will cry, I can tell you will cry. You will tremble and shout, you'll be a regular circus. I don't know how I can tell. For you it will be sex, yes it will. For you, sir, I believe it will be a small thing. But no less treasured, no less profound. Like a jewel kept in a velvet box.

For those of you who came for other aims, you may consider yourself tricked. But let me tell you why I didn't clear this earlier. I consider everyone alive on this earth, somewhere on the road to salvation.

No thief wants to be himself stolen from.

No liar wants to be lied to.

A jeerer's worst fear is you laughing at him.

No molester, no taker, wants his own home ravaged.

No rich man wants to be poor.

No woman who has servants wants herself to be servant.

And what is profit but theft?

No matter how bad you think you are, you're no worse than anybody else. Everybody has murdered some part of another person. Everybody who owns two pair of shoes instead of one has, in some measure, stolen.

See this jar. My jar. This is a jar full of hundred dollar bills all together the amount you paid to come here today. I'm going to set it right here and if anyone wants to leave you are welcome to come take your money and go on.

No one?

Really?

Don't worry about offending. I'm beyond offense. Used to it.

The second time I wanted to die was just ordinary time, nothing really wrong. You see faith is slippery. And I have that

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in me, that is my charm for success in shopping malls, the locket I carry on me is a relic of that feeling—that, let somebody else do it, I don' care, I am ready to go.

Every thing contains in a small measure, it's opposite.

ABIDING is a beautiful word.

Don't take things against your interest as absolute true. Every law, every document, even our Bible needs revision. The Old Testament will have God taking revenge on the children of children of families. I will not accept that.

I never thought I was so great. But He did.

Today is only our first day. Confession. Tomorrow we'll fast, Wednesday do penance, Thursday is conversion, Friday communion and gospel and Saturday, prayer. So these are the days of our week here.

You've heard my confession.

Now I want to learn yours. Think about it a minute. Now that you know, see if you still want to open yourself and try and believe in somebody like me.

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Two Poems by John Ashbery

Korean Soap Opera

My sister and I don't seem to get along too well anymore.
She always has to have everything new in her house.
  Cherished ideals
don't suit her teal, rust and eggshell color scheme.
Of course, I was a buyer when she was still on the street
peddling the Communist youth weekly. I have a degree
in marketing. Her boyfriend thinks I'm old-fashioned.
Well, I guess I do have an old-fashioned mentality.

What kind of a mentality
causes men to commit suicide in their air-conditioned glass
  boxes?
It has been a life of adjustments. I adjusted to the postwar
  boom
though it broke up my family. Some took their honor to
  the mountains,
to live on wood and water. But the investment years
wrought havoc with the landscape. Everything is modular
  now, even the trees.

Under the dizzying parabolas of the railroad bridge, where
  the thud
of laundry mallets used to resound, the swiftly flowing
current is like green cream, like baize unfit for fulling.
So old are the ways,
for lunch one might select a large smelly radish.
In the streets, as always, there is a smell of frying fish
no one notices. The rain cannot make up its mind.
Other people like it other ways.

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I need to interact with postal employees, civil servants,
that sort of thing.
Just being asleep isn't enough.
I must cry out against injustice in whatever position
sleep overtakes me. Only then will I have understood what
the world
and servants mean by self-abolishment, the key, it is said,
to success. To stand and contemplate the sea
is to comprehend part of the package. What we need,
therefore,
is market gardens bringing a sense of time with them,
of this time, honed to razor-sharpness. Yet the whole
scheme is invisible to any shareholder, and so the feeling
lessens, the idea that a composite portrait
may not be so important after all takes over like the
shoulder
of a mill-wheel, slogging patiently under water, then back
to the zenith, where the watchword presumably is.
In schools they teach things like plus and minus
but not in the gorge, not in boiling mud.
Area residents were jolted to find what in essence
was a large swamp, pythons and all, in their communal
front yard.
To me, this is insensate. I cannot stand the wind at my
back
making of me nothing, to be handed
over, in turn, to this
man, this man. For though he weathered patiently
the name, the one that occurs to all of us, he went out
and came in, not in the best interests of abundance;
not, it seems, being anything but about to fall.

Here's a paradox for you: if the men are segregated
then why are the women not?
If the rich can survive dust-storms thanks to their red-and-
gold liveried
postilions, then you are playing with an alphabet here:
nothing

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you invent can be a plenipotentiary,
turn itself inside-out, radiate
iron spokes at the mini-landscape, and so side with a population
of bears, who knows? Who knows how much there can be
of any one thing if another one stops existing? And the word
you give to this
man, this man, is cold,
fossil fuel.

One snorts in the laundry, another
is broken beside the bed. A third is suspended
in a baobab for all the sins
no one ever knew, for sins of omission are like pearls
next to the sin of not knowing, and being excused
for it. So it all comes round
to individual responsibility and awareness,
that circus of dusty dramas, denuded forests and car dealer-
ships, a place
where anything can and does happen, and hours and hours
go by.

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Of Linnets and Dull Time

You said you don't want to know any more
than you do now, of every thing that might be
a person. It would be cheating. That is urgent.
If we are going to mean in so many ways
let them all be lopped off.
That way we'll know you're getting older.

I feel sorry for anyone that has to die.
The lines of what's expected
fan out like beaters. That's all,
I think. But I lose things, now.
The beautiful shape of the toilet interposed
a viability as the air-raid drill ended.
We've got to do something.
He may be up there now, trying to find us.
If you let me, I'll drive you back to the fairgrounds.

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Suzanne Gardinier

Citizens

1

Smoking a cigarette in a classroom
a woman is copying sentences from
a book called Our American Way of Life
specifically the section called Practice
for Citizenship The others have gone
I want to be an American
citizen she writes and smiles *I have*
studied the American Constitution
I have a pen in my right hand
Today is a beautiful day I can
read write and speak simple English There are
many cars on the street I am working at
here is a blank to fill *Red Apple*
Supermarket It is raining now May
I write something else I will do my best
to be a worthy citizen I
enjoy my work She lays down the pen
rubs her eyes and turns to the section called
At Work and reads *This is a factory*
Many men work in this factory They
are factory workers This is an office
These women work in the office They are
office workers Everyone is smiling
She is left-handed and her back aches from
eight hours at the market stacking canned peaches

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2

As she nods down into and up from sleep
on a bus crossing the George Washington Bridge
sun glints in her eyes from the girders and
her left thumb wrapped in a plastic bandage
flinches at the edge of a sheet titled
UNEMPLOYMENT *Discuss these questions with*
your class Repeat each word after the tape
the sheet orders as the black knot of hair
at the back of her neck lifts and lowers
with the waves of her tiredness *Al lost his job*
He _____ for unemployment The _____
decided to move the plant from this country
to Singapore _____ is cheaper in many
other countries US workers don't _____
hard enough Unions often go on _____
Practice these phrases 'as a matter of fact'
'interest rates' 'closed down' 'let go' Her lips move
under her cheekbones' sharp ridges past school
buses past white Greek letters on the blasted
rock flanking Route 4 past Applications
Now Being Accepted at gas stations *No*
he's glad to have the time off she reads *No*
he's not looking very hard One strand
of her hair wisps loose and touches her cotton
coat's shoulder *The people are in a long line*

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3

To the harried woman whose worldly accounts
are completely temporarily squared
the thirty-four dollars and twenty-nine
cents she owed The Telephone Company
paid weeks before the unlocked mailbox
offers a letter from Room 208
Pearl Street William I Weiss a man she does not
know The black print knocks fear into her chest
On the letter inside written by a machine
in gray capitals Mr. Weiss is replaced
by a Mrs. J Ragula who raps out
all the harried woman's names after DEAR
I AM SURE YOU WILL AGREE I HAVE BEEN
VERY PATIENT IN WAITING SO LONG
FOR PAYMENT UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES
THERE APPEARS TO BE NO ALTERNATIVE
BUT TO FORWARD YOUR ACCOUNT TO OUR
ATTORNEY FOR SUIT HAVING IN MIND
THE EMBARRASSMENT AND ADDITIONAL
EXPENSE TO WHICH YOU WILL BE PUT I AM
WRITING TO OFFER YOU ANOTHER
OPPORTUNITY TO COOPERATE
Anything she wants to cry rifling
her thoughts for overlooked transgressions
I'm sorry Please tell me what I have done

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4

Fine ripe strawberries Smoke Smoke Check it out
Fine ripe strawberries Friends Jesus is walking
up Broadway with you Pineapples fine pine-
apples My baby needs diapers and sheets
for her crib Can you help me Here's your fine
watermelons Sweet potatoes Carolina
potatoes warm Act Now One Day Only
Baked pears Hot corn Clams Choice clams
Get your choice clams here Burn that kike house down
Here's your Rockaway beach clams fine sand clams
They could've just raped her They didn't have to
Oysters beauties of oysters O Jesus
my babies Here's tea rusk Tea rusk here Hey
faggot You like that faggot Cat tails
Ho Cat tails to make beds going Life
attention Life attention Here's white sand
That's right you little nigger you're dying
Choice sand Lily-white sand Now it's pretty
The poor people are gone Here's your Rockaway
beach sand Yes I did see the body Yes
it was my son Michael Matches Fine dry
matches here You look all right Here's another
Get your matches She'll take care of him Tie him
to that chair and salt water after Pine-
apples sweet fresh pineapples here

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5

It's early and summer and thirteen people
are gathered at Broadway and 112th
The cathedral towers behind them A car
has plowed into a taxi and into
the island dividing the traffic streams
Each of the thirteen suddenly has
a role in the morning's civil process
Four are police One calms and questions
the cab driver whose forehead gleams with sweat
who curses the road and cops the morning
and the other driver gesticulating
sweating calmed and questioned by another
officer Her two remaining colleagues
split and squat on their heels at the haunches
of the damaged vehicles squinting sighing
scratching summonses notes and diagrams
on leather-bound pads The cab used to be
a hulking yellow Chevy Caprice
A white-haired man in suspenders stands
sentinel at its crumpled hood A woman
with long hair gathered and tied at her neck
and a plaid cotton sundress sucks a blue
fruit and guards the rear bumper They call
across to each other and shake their heads
The two passengers who emerged from the green

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Nova upon impact flank the driver
Sweat has started to stain his shirt under
his tie and creep from under his arms
to his belt Gently they hold his elbows
when he starts to butt his forehead toward
the cab driver and his voice climbs from its
speaking octave to shouting A grocer
in a white apron covered with flour
ties her sash wipes her hands on a cloth
and listens to the cab driver nodding
She crosses to the sidewalk telephone
and talks into the receiver Someone
else has given up her seat in the air-
conditioned room where the automatic
bank teller machines are maintained to take
a position near the Nova She
passes her hand through the ripples of heat
that pour from the vents at its windshield's base
A guy from the deli in a Yankees
cap the curved broken bill pulled down
to his eyebrows guides the impatient northbound
traffic around the outcropping of
the cab's rear end No one's dignity or
flesh is broken The possibility
of violence hovers and is refused

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Michael Burkard

But Beautiful

But beautiful is the dog lost,
once headed east, then later

in the dark south. But
beautiful is the cold

which never seems to stay.
Dead Robert is but beautiful,

although other than that
I know not what to say.

Never knew him. Only
in stories told to me

by Charlie does the sun
shine on Robert. And Martha

is but beautiful, though
always was the sense we

conversed in small circles,
nevertheless conversed.

And another Charlie and
another Martha, two old

cousins gone now who-
knows-where. But they

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were fine, had a big
old honestly red barn

and a dog whose name
I forget who one Sunday

was attacked by a por-
cupine. But beautiful

is Jane, and Jay and
Clay. Jane is ill,

too ill to be known
for the time being.

But beautiful, like
a simple star shining

when the day is still
dying, and night

wonders if it can
get up, and out.

But beautiful is
the beginning, the

day dear, near or far.
Simple people.

Some who die, some
who die while in

your life. Some who
do violent things.

Some who are forgiven
by themselves. But

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beautiful is the drive
up the river's side.

All these people
have taken it.

Like a fairy tale
in which the hero

or heroine, son
or daughter, receives

a song of grace,
a secret grace, to

bestow upon the
journey when the time

arrives. But
beautiful to retrieve

them, one by one,
and one for all.

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Ian Ganassi

Primary Process

"Some things, niño, some things are like this . . ."

A large unpleasant woman
Is chasing a songbird around the kitchen
With a broom shouting
"Literalist of the Imagination

Be gone!" Her husband stands in the yard
In front of the open kitchen window
Holding his mouth open hungrily.
He wears a monocle and has a dry martini in one hand

And a copy of a Great Work in the other.
He's taking a lunch break from translating
The Great Work into modern Armenian.
The songbird is not happy.

The songbird is intimate with the Great Work
But because he only knows to sing it
The large unpleasant woman's husband
Sees the songbird as an enemy of civilization.

While it was in its cage in the arboretum
Singing for the large unpleasant couple's
Daughter and son in their ballet fatigues
Everything was fine. But now the bird

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Has taken on air, is charming the neighbors'
Cats, looking for a way out. It would never do.
The songbird is a brilliant flash
In the face of the white pillared house.

He is like the painter with Alzheimer's
Who can still paint because that part of his brain
Is as yet unaffected. The large unpleasant couple
Are entirely affected. Affectation is their state of grace.

The bird is an ignorant man and a wise bird.
The knowledgeable man imagines a thanksgiving dinner
With all his friends sipping dry Martinis
And the bird as the *pièce de résistance.*

But alas, the songbird has found a way out.
He is eaten by a cat. The cat takes on his colors.
Together, they are fantastically beautiful.
They sing away into the summer morning trees.

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Martin Edmunds

Bella Roma

Junked hypodermics made it hard to walk
along the Tiber by the deserted, grand
sandstone embankment of the temple block.
In the river, itself the color of umber mud under sand,
two navy frogmen hugged us for a block.
The bubbles from their air tanks pocked
the water. Twin snorkels rose to slice
the sleazy surface. An inflated life boat
weighed down by officers in summer whites
was making progressively tighter figure 8's,
drawing in nets with water bottle floats.
A cardinal streaked by in a chauffeured launch,
pudgy fingers folded flat against his paunch.
His backwash brought the frogmen to a boil.
A fisherman smashed his rod. He wolfed the bait,
cold anchovies in a film of oil
on bread rounds from a blinding china plate.
Glass masks flashed in the sun. Underfoot,
the needles crunched, a dusting of Alpine ice
or wedding rice.
By the Ripetta, my paisano, a New Englander,
lived in a certain stone locanda, for there
a drying pair
of some Celtics' fan's green-topped socks
finished the flag on a red window box.
Augustus still smiles on his slaves and their latest gods.
In that poor soil, a bursting milkweedpod's
silk purse was turning to a sow's cracked ear.
I thought of Circe. My Sicilian muse
burned to no purpose in the dogdays' heat
and the dust of the street.

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The sulphurous Tiber sputtered like a fuse.
The noon hour made the city's scizzy air
taste like *soldi*, like holy water from the scalloped fonts
of Santa Maria del Populo. Navona Square
was huge and carless, but some days a sick fog haunts
its waters, and our hired guide said it stains
everything except the orphaned kids
who get the pennies if they clean the drains.
I came by bus each evening to watch the rain's
glass ampules shatter on Neptune's heavy lids.
A black river issues from the catacombs
of the Metro exit
to swamp St. Peter's Square and kiss his foot—
a filthy custom, some contend, but, *ut*
poetice loquar,
not every pilgrim can kiss Pope John Paul's ring.
Each day's sky is a vast rotunda, its glass dome
consumes the music of our suffering.
In Rome, all roads lead away from Rome.
The altar's roped off like a boxing ring.

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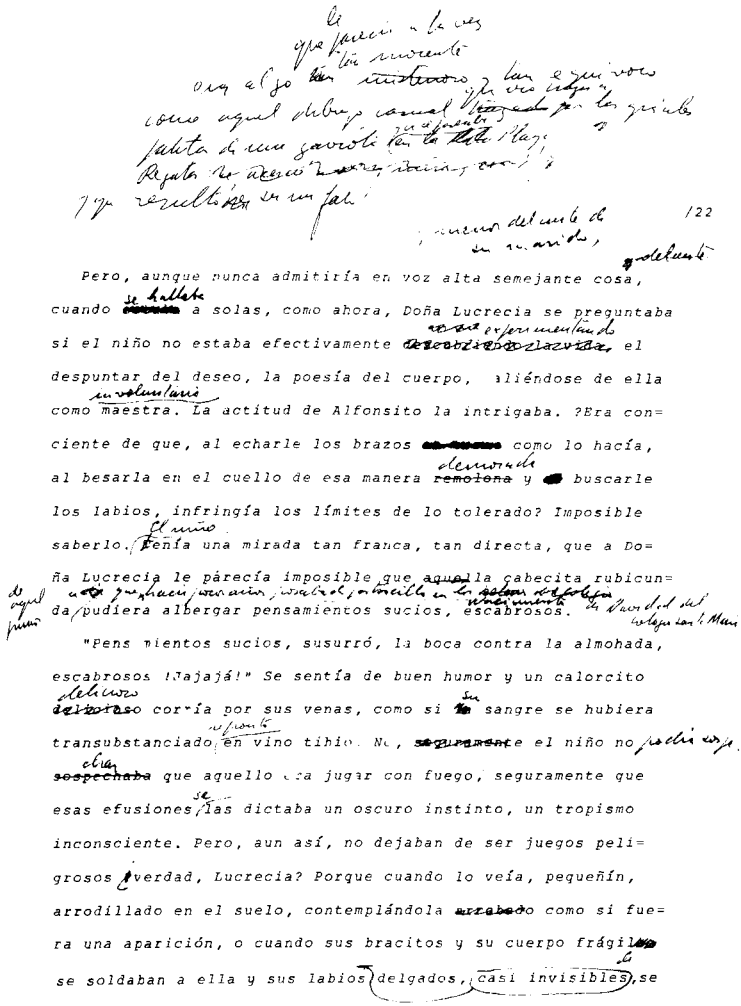

A manuscript page from Mario Vargas Llosa's most recent novel, In Praise of the Stepmother.

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The Art of Fiction CXX
Mario Vargas Llosa

In this interview Mario Vargas Llosa speaks of the inviolable mornings he spends in his office writing, seven days a week. In the fall of 1988, however, he decided to interrupt this otherwise strictly kept schedule to run as the Libertad party candidate for the presidency of Peru. Vargas Llosa has long been outspoken on the subject of Peruvian politics and has made Peruvian political issues the subject of several of his novels. Yet until the most recent elections he had always resisted suggestions that he run for political office. During the campaign he mentioned his difficulty with the empty emo-

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tionalism and rhetoric that are the language of electoral politics. Following the multiparty election, he lost a runoff to Alberto Fujimori on June 10, 1990.

Mario Vargas Llosa was born in 1936 in Arequipa, a small town in southern Peru. While he was still an infant Vargas Llosa's parents divorced and he moved to Cochabamba, Bolivia with his mother's grandparents. In 1945 he returned to Peru, where he attended Leoncio Prado Military Academy and studied law at the University of Lima. At nineteen he married his aunt by marriage, Julia Urquid Illanes, who was fourteen years his senior. This first marriage later served as subject matter for his novel Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter *(1982). After finishing his studies in Lima, Vargas Llosa went into a seventeen-year, self-imposed exile from Peru, during which he lived in France, England and Spain and traveled in the Amazon. After receiving his doctorate in Madrid, he worked as a journalist and lecturer. It was during this period of exile that he began writing novels.* The Time of the Hero, *Vargas Llosa's first novel, was published in Spain in 1963 and is based on his experiences in the military academy. His other novels include* The Green House, *(1963),* Conversation in the Cathedral *(1969) and* The War of the End of the World *(1981).*

Vargas Llosa is also a playwright, an essayist and has produced a weekly interview program on Peruvian television. He has been the recipient of numerous international literary awards and was the president of PEN from 1976 to 1979. He has three children and lives with his second wife, Patricia, in Lima, in an apartment overlooking the Pacific.

INTERVIEWER

You are a well-known writer and your readers are familiar with what you've written. Will you tell us what you read?

MARIO VARGAS LLOSA

In the last few years, something curious has happened. I've noticed that I'm reading less and less by my contemporaries and more and more by writers of the past. I read much more from the nineteenth century than from the twentieth. These

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days, I lean perhaps less toward literary works than toward essays and history. I haven't given much thought to why I read what I read. . . . Sometimes it's professional reasons. My literary projects are related to the nineteenth century: an essay about Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, or a novel inspired by the life of Flora Tristan, a Franco-Peruvian social reformer and "feminist" *avant-la-lettre*. But then I also think it's because at fifteen or eighteen, you feel as if you have all the time in the world ahead of you. When you turn fifty, you become aware that your days are numbered and that you have to be selective. That's probably why I don't read my contemporaries as much.

INTERVIEWER

But among your contemporaries that you do read, whom do you particularly admire?

VARGAS LLOSA

When I was young, I was a passionate reader of Sartre. I've read the American novelists, in particular the lost generation—Faulkner, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos—especially Faulkner. Of the authors I read when I was young, he is one of the few who still means a lot to me. I have never been disappointed when I reread him, the way I have been occasionally with, say, Hemingway. I wouldn't reread Sartre today. Compared to everything I've read since, his fiction seems dated and has lost much of its value. As for his essays, I find most of them to be less important, with one exception perhaps: "Saint Genet: Comedian or Martyr," which I still like. They are full of contradictions, ambiguities, inaccuracies and ramblings, something that never happened with Faulkner. Faulkner was the first novelist I read with pen and paper in hand, because his technique stunned me. He was the first novelist whose work I consciously tried to reconstruct by attempting to trace, for example, the organization of time, the intersection of time and place, the breaks in the narrative, and that ability he has of telling a story from different points of view in order to create a certain ambiguity, to give it added depth. As a Latin American, I think it was very useful for me to read

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his books when I did because they are a precious source of descriptive techniques that are applicable to a world which, in a sense, is not so unlike the one Faulkner described. Later, of course, I read the nineteenth-century novelists with a consuming passion: Flaubert, Balzac, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy, Stendhal, Hawthorne, Dickens, Melville. I'm still an avid reader of nineteenth-century writers.

As for Latin American literature, strangely enough, it wasn't until I lived in Europe that I really discovered it and began to read it with great enthusiasm. I had to teach it at the university in London, which was a very enriching experience because it forced me to think about Latin American literature as a whole. From then on I read Borges, whom I was somewhat familiar with, Carpentíer, Cortázar, Guimaraes Rosa, Lezama Lima—that whole generation except for García Márquez. I discovered him later and even wrote a book about him: *García Márquez: Historia de un Decidio*. I also began reading nineteenth-century Latin American literature because I had to teach it. I realized then that we have extremely interesting writers—the novelists perhaps less so than the essayists or poets. Sarmiento, for example, who never wrote a novel, is in my opinion one of the greatest storytellers Latin America has produced; his *Facundo* is a masterwork. But if I were forced to choose one name, I would have to say Borges, because the world he creates seems to me to be absolutely original. Aside from his enormous originality, he is also endowed with a tremendous imagination and culture that are expressly his own. And then of course there is the language of Borges, which in a sense broke with our tradition and opened a new one. Spanish is a language that tends toward exuberance, proliferation, profusion. Our great writers have all been prolix, from Cervantes to Ortega y Gasset, Valle-Inclán or Alfonso Reyes. Borges is the opposite—all concision, economy and precision. He is the only writer in the Spanish language who has almost as many ideas as he has words. He's one of the great writers of our time.

INTERVIEWER

What was your relationship to Borges?

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VARGAS LLOSA

I saw him for the first time in Paris where I lived in the early sixties. He was there giving seminars on the literature of the fantastic and *gauchesca* literature. Later I interviewed him for the Office de Radio Television Française where I was working at the time. I still remember it with emotion. After that, we saw each other several times in different parts of the world, even in Lima, where I gave a dinner for him. At the end he asked me to take him to the toilet. When he was peeing he suddenly said, "The Catholics, do you think they are serious? Probably not."

The last time I saw him was at his house in Buenos Aires; I interviewed him for a television show I had in Peru and I got the impression he resented some of the questions I asked him. Strangely, he got mad because, after the interview—during which, of course, I was extremely attentive, not only because of the admiration I felt for him but also because of the great affection I had for the charming and fragile man that he was—I said I was surprised by the modesty of his house, which had peeling walls and leaks in the roof. This apparently deeply offended him. I saw him once more after that and he was extremely distant. Octavio Paz told me that he really resented that particular remark about his house. The only thing that might have hurt him is what I have just related, because otherwise I have never done anything but praise him. I don't think he read my books. According to him, he never read a single living writer after he turned forty, just read and reread the same books . . . . But he's a writer I very much admire. He's not the only one, of course. Pablo Neruda is an extraordinary poet. And Octavio Paz—not only a great poet, but a great essayist, a man who is articulate about politics, art and literature. His curiosity is universal. I still read him with great pleasure. Also, his political ideas are quite similar to mine.

INTERVIEWER

You mention Neruda among the writers you admire. You were his friend. What was he like?

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VARGAS LLOSA

Neruda adored life. He was wild about everything—painting, art in general, books, rare editions, food, drink. Eating and drinking were almost a mystical experience for him. A wonderfully likeable man, full of vitality—if you forget his poems in praise of Stalin, of course. He lived in a near-feudal world, where everything led to his rejoicing, his sweet-toothed exuberance for life. I had the good fortune to spend a weekend on Isla Negra. It was wonderful! A kind of social machinery worked around him: hordes of people who cooked and worked—and always quantities of guests. It was a very funny society, extraordinarily alive, without the slightest trace of intellectualism. Neruda was exactly the opposite of Borges, the man who appeared never to drink, smoke or eat, who one would have said had never made love, for whom all these things seemed completely secondary, and if he had done them it was out of politeness and nothing more. That's because ideas, reading, reflection, and creation were his life, the purely cerebral life. Neruda comes out of the Jorge Amado and Rafael Alberti tradition that says literature is generated by a sensual experience of life.

I remember the day we celebrated Neruda's birthday in London. He wanted to have the party on a boat on the Thames. Fortunately, one of his admirers, the English poet Alastair Reid, happened to live on a boat on the Thames, so we were able to organize a party for him. The moment came and he announced that he was going to make a cocktail. It was the most expensive drink in the world with I don't know how many bottles of Dom Perignon, fruit juices and God knows what else. The result, of course, was wonderful, but one glass of it was enough to make you drunk. So there we were, drunk every one of us, without exception. Even so, I still remember what he told me then; something that has proven to be a great truth over the years. An article at the time—I can't remember what it was about— had upset and irritated me because it insulted me and told lies about me. I showed it to Neruda. In the middle of the party, he prophesied: "You are becoming

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famous. I want you to know what awaits you: the more famous you are, the more you will be attacked like this. For every praise, there will be two or three insults. I myself have a chest full of all the insults, villainies, and infamies a man is capable of withstanding. I wasn't spared a single one: thief, pervert, traitor, thug, cuckold . . . everything! If you become famous, you will have to go through that."

Neruda told the truth; his prognosis came absolutely true. I not only have a chest, but several suitcases full of articles that contain every insult known to man.

INTERVIEWER

What about García Márquez?

VARGAS LLOSA

We were friends; we were neighbors for two years in Barcelona, we lived on the same street. Later, we drifted apart for personal as well as political reasons. But the original cause for the separation was a personal problem that had no relation whatsoever to his ideological beliefs—which I don't approve of either. In my opinion, his writing and his politics are not of the same quality. Let's just say that I greatly admire his work as a writer. As I've already said, I wrote a six-hundred-page book on his work. But I don't have much respect for him personally, nor for his political beliefs which don't seem serious to me. I think they're opportunistic and publicity-oriented.

INTERVIEWER

Is the personal problem you mentioned related to an incident at a movie theater in Mexico where you allegedly fought?

VARGAS LLOSA

There was an incident in Mexico. But this is a subject that I don't care to discuss; it has given rise to so much speculation that I don't want to supply more material for commentators. If I write my memoirs, maybe I'll tell the true story.

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INTERVIEWER

Do you choose the subjects of your books or do they choose you?

VARGAS LLOSA

As far as I'm concerned, I believe the subject chooses the writer. I've always had the feeling that certain stories imposed themselves on me; I couldn't ignore them, because in some obscure way, they related to some kind of fundamental experience—I can't really say how. For example, the time I spent at the Leoncio Prado Military School in Lima when I was still a young boy gave me a real need, an obsessive desire to write. It was an extremely traumatic experience which in many ways marked the end of my childhood—the rediscovery of my country as a violent society, filled with bitterness, made up of social, cultural and racial factions in complete opposition and caught up in sometimes ferocious battle. I suppose the experience had an influence on me, one thing I'm sure of is that it gave rise to the great need in me to create, to invent.

Up until now, it's been pretty much the same for all my books. I never get the feeling that I've decided rationally, coldbloodedly to write a story. On the contrary, certain events or people, sometimes dreams or readings, impose themselves suddenly and demand attention. That's why I talk so much about the importance of the purely irrational elements of literary creation. This irrationality must also, I believe, come through to the reader. I would like my novels to be read the way I read the novels I love. The novels that have fascinated me most are the ones that have reached me less through the channels of the intellect or reason than bewitched me. These are stories capable of completely annihilating all my critical faculties so that I'm left there, in suspense. That's the kind of novel I like to read and the kind of novel I'd like to write. I think it's very important that the intellectual element, whose presence is inevitable in a novel, dissolves into the action, into the stories that must seduce the reader not by their ideas but by their color, by the emotions they inspire, by their element of surprise, and by all the suspense and mystery they're cap-

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able of generating. In my opinion, a novel's technique exists essentially to produce that effect: to diminish and if possible abolish the distance between the story and the reader. In that sense, I am a writer of the nineteenth century. The novel for me is still the novel of adventures, which is read in the particular way I have described.

INTERVIEWER

What's become of the humor in your novels? Your most recent novels seem far from the humor of *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter.* Is it hard to practice humor today?

VARGAS LLOSA

It's never occurred to me to ask myself whether today I will write a funny book or a serious one. The subjects of the books I've written in the last few years just didn't lend themselves to humor. I don't think *War of the End of the World* and *The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta* or the plays I've written are based on themes that can be treated humorously. And what about *In Praise of the Stepmother*? There's plenty of humor there, isn't there?

I used to be "allergic" to humor because I thought, very naively, that serious literature never smiled; that humor could be very dangerous if I wanted to broach serious social, political, or cultural problems in my novels. I thought it would make my stories seem superficial and give my reader the impression that they were nothing more than light entertainment. That's why I had renounced humor, probably under the influence of Sartre who was always very hostile to humor, at least in his writing. But one day, I discovered that in order to effect a certain experience of life in literature, humor could be a very precious tool. That happened with *Pantaleon and the Special Service.* From then on, I was very conscious of humor as a great treasure, a basic element of life and therefore of literature. And I don't exclude the possibility that it will play a prominent role again in my novels. As a matter of fact it has. This is also true of my plays, particularly *Kathie and the Hippopotamus.*

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INTERVIEWER

Can you tell us about your work habits? How do you work? How does a novel originate?

VARGAS LLOSA

First of all, it's a daydream, a kind of rumination about a person, a situation, something that occurs only in the mind. Then I start to take notes, summaries of narrative sequences: somebody enters the scene here, leaves there, does this or that. When I start working on the novel itself, I draw up a general outline of the plot—which I never hold to, changing it completely as I go along, but which allows me to get started. Then I start putting it together, without the slightest preoccupation with style, writing and rewriting the same scenes, making up completely contradictory situations . . . .

The raw material helps me, reassures me. But it's the part of writing I have the hardest time with. When I'm at that stage, I proceed very warily, always unsure of the result. The first version is written in a real state of anxiety. Then once I've finished that draft—which can sometimes take a long time: for *The War of the End of the World*, the first stage lasted almost two years—everything changes. I know then that the story is there, buried in what I call my "magma." It's absolute chaos but the novel is in there, lost in a mass of dead elements, superfluous scenes that will disappear or scenes that are repeated several times from different perspectives, with different characters. It's very chaotic and makes sense only to me. But the story is born under there. You have to separate it from the rest, clean it up, and that's the most pleasant part of the work. From then on I am able to work much longer hours without the anxiety and tension that accompanies the writing of that first draft. I think what I love is not the writing itself, but the rewriting, the editing, the correcting . . . I think it's the most creative part of writing. I never know when I'm going to finish a story. A piece I thought would only take a few months has sometimes taken me several years to finish. A novel seems finished to me when I start feeling that if I don't end it soon,

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it will get the better of me. When I've reached saturation, when I've had enough, when I just can't take it anymore, then the story is finished.

INTERVIEWER

Do you write by hand, on the typewriter, or do you alternate?

VARGAS LLOSA

First, I write by hand. I always work in the morning, and in the early hours of the day, I always write by hand. Those are the most creative hours. I never work more than two hours like this—my hand gets cramped. Then I start typing what I've written, making changes as I go along; this is perhaps the first stage of rewriting. But I always leave a few lines untyped so that the next day, I can start by typing the end of what I'd written the day before. Starting up the typewriter creates a certain dynamic—it's like a warm-up exercise.

INTERVIEWER

Hemingway used that same technique of always leaving a sentence half-written so he could pick up the thread the next day. . . .

VARGAS LLOSA

Yes, he thought he should never write out all he had in mind so that he could start up more easily the next day. The hardest part, it always seems to me, is starting. In the morning, making contact again, the anxiety of it . . . But if you have something mechanical to do, the work has already begun. The machine starts to work. Anyway, I have a very rigorous work schedule. Every morning until two in the afternoon, I stay in my office. These hours are sacred to me. That doesn't mean I'm always writing; sometimes I'm revising or taking notes. But I remain systematically at work. There are, of course, the good days for creation and the bad ones. But I work every day because even if I don't have any new ideas, I can spend the

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time making corrections, revising, taking notes, et cetera. . . . Sometimes I decide to rewrite a finished piece, if only to change the punctuation.

Monday through Saturday, I work on the novel in progress, and I devote Sunday mornings to journalistic work—articles and essays. I try to keep this kind of work within the allotted time of Sunday so that it doesn't infringe on the creative work of the rest of the week. Sometimes I listen to classical music when I take notes, as long as there's no singing. It's something I started doing when I lived in a very noisy house. In the mornings, I work alone, nobody comes up to my office. I don't even take phone calls. If I did, my life would be a living hell. You cannot imagine how many phone calls and visitors I get. Everyone knows this house. My address unfortunately fell into the public domain.

INTERVIEWER

You never let go of this spartan routine?

VARGAS LLOSA

I can't seem to, I don't know how to work otherwise. If I started to wait for moments of inspiration, I would never finish a book. Inspiration for me comes from a regular effort. This routine allows me to work, with great exultation or without, depending on the days.

INTERVIEWER

Victor Hugo, among other writers, believed in the magical force of inspiration. Gabriel García Márquez said that after years of struggling with *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the novel wrote itself in his head during a trip to Acapulco in a car. You have just stated that inspiration is for you a product of discipline, but have you never known the famous "illumination?"

VARGAS LLOSA

It's never happened to me. It's a much slower process. In the

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beginning there's something very nebulous, a state of alert, a wariness, a curiosity. Something I perceive in the fog and vagueness which arouses my interest, curiosity, and excitement and then translates itself into work, note cards, the summary of the plot. Then when I have the outline and start to put things in order, something very diffuse, very nebulous still persists. The "illumination" only occurs during the work. It's the hard work that, at any given time, can unleash that . . . heightened perception, that excitement capable of bringing about revelation, solution, and light. When I reach the heart of a story I've been working on for some time, then, yes, something does happen. The story ceases to be cold, unrelated to me. On the contrary, it becomes so alive, so important that everything I experience exists only in relation to what I'm writing. Everything I hear, see, read seems in one way or another to help my work. I become a kind of cannibal of reality. But to reach this state, I have to go through the catharsis of work. I live a kind of permanent double life. I do a thousand different things but I always have my mind on my work. Obviously, sometimes it becomes obsessive, neurotic. During those times, seeing a movie relaxes me. At the end of a day of intense work, when I find myself in a state of great inner turmoil, a movie does me a great deal of good.

INTERVIEWER

Pedro Nava, the memorialist, went as far as to draw some of his characters—their face, their hair, their clothes. Do you ever do that?

VARGAS LLOSA

No, but in certain cases, I do make up biographical sheets. It depends on the way I sense the character. Although the characters do sometimes appear to me visually, I also identify them by the way they express themselves or in relation to the facts surrounding them. But it does happen that a character is defined by physical characteristics that I have to get down on paper. But despite all the notes you can take for a novel,

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I think that in the end what counts is what the memory selects. What remains is the most important. That's why I have never taken a camera with me on my research expeditions.

INTERVIEWER

So, for a certain time, your characters are not related to each other? Each has his or her own personal history?

VARGAS LLOSA

In the beginning, everything is so cold, so artificial and dead! Little by little, it all begins to come alive, as each character takes on associations and relationships. That's what is wonderful and fascinating: when you begin to discover that lines of force already exist naturally in the story. But before getting to that point, it's nothing but work, work, and more work. In everyday life, there are certain people, certain events, that seem to fill a void or fulfill a need. Suddenly you become aware of exactly what you need to know for the piece you're working on. The representation is never true to the real person, it becomes altered, falsified. But that kind of encounter only occurs when the story has reached an advanced stage, when everything seems to nourish it further. Sometimes, it's a kind of recognition: "Oh, that's the face I was looking for, that intonation, that way of speaking. . . ." On the other hand, you can lose control of your characters which happens to me constantly because mine are never born out of purely rational considerations. They're expressions of more instinctual forces at work. That's why some of them immediately take on more importance or seem to develop by themselves, as it were. Others are relegated to the background, even if they weren't meant to, to begin with. That's the most interesting part of the work, when you realize that certain characters are asking to be given more prominence, when you begin to see that the story is governed by its own laws which you cannot violate. It becomes apparent that the author cannot mold characters as he pleases, that they have a certain autonomy. It's the most exciting moment when you discover life in what you've created, a life you have to respect.

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INTERVIEWER

Much of your work was written outside of Peru, in what one might call a voluntary exile. You stated once that the fact Victor Hugo wrote out of his own country contributed to the greatness of a novel like *Les Misérables*. To find oneself far from "the vertigo of reality" is somehow an advantage for the reconstruction of that same reality. Do you find reality to be a source of vertigo?

VARGAS LLOSA

Yes, in the sense that I've never been able to write about what's close to me. Proximity is inhibiting in the sense that it doesn't allow me to work freely. It's very important to be able to work with enough freedom to allow you to transform reality, to change people, to make them act differently, or to introduce a personal element into the narrative, some perfectly arbitrary thing. It's absolutely essential. That's what creation is. If you have the reality before you, it seems to me it becomes a constraint. I always need a certain distance, time-wise, or better still, in time and place. In that sense, exile has been very beneficial. Because of it, I discovered discipline. I discovered that writing was work, and for the most part, an obligation. Distance has also been useful because I believe in the great importance of nostalgia for the writer. Generally speaking, the absence of the subject fertilizes the memory. For example, Peru in *The Green House* is not just a depiction of reality, but the subject of nostalgia for a man who is deprived of it and feels a painful desire for it. At the same time, I think distance creates a useful perspective. It distills reality, that complicated thing which makes us dizzy. It's very hard to select or distinguish between what's important and what is secondary. Distance makes that distinction possible. It establishes the necessary hierarchies between the essential and the transient.

INTERVIEWER

In an essay you published a few years ago, you wrote that literature is a passion, and that passion is exclusive and requires all sacrifices to be made and makes none of its own.

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"The primary duty is not to live but to write," which reminds me of something Fernando Pessoa, the Portuguese poet, wrote: "To navigate is necessary, to live is unnecessary."

VARGAS LLOSA

You could say that to write is necessary and to live is unnecessary. . . . I should probably tell you something about me, so that people will understand me better. Literature has been very important to me ever since I was a child. But even though I read and wrote a lot during my school years, I never imagined that I would one day devote myself exclusively to literature, because at the time it seemed too much of a luxury for a Latin American, especially a Peruvian. I pursued other things: I planned to go into law, to be a professor or a journalist. I had accepted that what was essential to me would be relegated to the background. But when I arrived in Europe with a scholarship after finishing university, I realized that if I continued to think that way, I would never become a writer, that the only way would be to decide officially that literature would be not only my main preoccupation, but my occupation. That's when I decided to devote myself entirely to literature. And since I couldn't support myself on it, I decided I would look for jobs that would leave me time to write and never become priorities. In other words, I would choose jobs in terms of my work as a writer. I think that decision marked a turning point in my life because from then on I had the power to write. There was a psychological change. That's why literature seems more like a passion to me than a profession. Obviously, it is a profession because I make my living off it. But even if I couldn't support myself on it, I would still continue to write. Literature is more than a *modus vivendi*. I believe the choice a writer makes to give himself entirely to his work, to put everything at the service of literature instead of subsuming it to other considerations is absolutely crucial. Some people think of it as a kind of complementary or decorative activity in a life devoted to other things or even as a way of acquiring prestige and power. In those cases, there's a block, it's literature avenging itself, not allowing you to write with any freedom, audacity, or origin-

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ality. That's why I think it's so important to make an absolutely total commitment to literature. What's strange is that in my case, when I made that decision, I thought it meant I chose a hard life, because I never imagined that literature could make me enough to live on, not to mention to live well. It seems like a kind of miracle. I still can't get over it. I didn't have to deprive myself of anything essential in order to write. I remember feeling much more frustrated and unhappy with myself when I couldn't write, when I was living in Peru before I left for Europe. I married when I was very young and I had to take any job I could get. I had as many as seven at a time! It was of course practically impossible for me to write. I wrote on Sundays, on holidays, but most of my time was spent on dreary work that had nothing to do with literature and I felt terribly frustrated by it. Today, when I wake up in the morning, I'm often amazed at the thought that I can spend my life doing what gives me the greatest pleasure, and further more, live off it, and well.

INTERVIEWER

Has literature made you rich?

VARGAS LLOSA

No, I'm not a rich man. If you compare a writer's income to a company president's, or to a man who has made a name for himself in one of the professions, or in Peru, to a toreador's or a top athlete's, you'll find that literature has remained an ill-paid profession.

INTERVIEWER

You once recalled that Hemingway felt empty, sad and happy at the same time after he finished a book. What do you feel in those circumstances?

VARGAS LLOSA

Exactly the same thing. When I finish a book, I feel an emptiness, a malaise, because the novel has become a part of me. From one day to the next, I see myself deprived of it—like an

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alcoholic who quits drinking. It's something that isn't simply accessory; life itself is suddenly torn from me. The only cure is to throw myself immediately into some other work, which isn't hard to do since I have a thousand projects to attend to. But I always have to get back to work immediately, without the slightest transition, so that I don't allow the void to dig itself deeper between the previous book and the next one.

INTERVIEWER

We've mentioned some of the writers whose work you admire. Now let's talk about your own work. You've said several times that *The War of the End of the World* is your best book. Do you still think that?

VARGAS LLOSA

It's the novel I put the most work into, the one I gave the most of myself for. It took me four years to write it. I had to do enormous research for it, read enormous amounts, and overcome great difficulties because it was the first time I was writing about a different country from my own, in an era that wasn't mine, and working with characters who spoke in a language which wasn't the book's. But never has a story excited me as much as that one did. Everything about the work fascinated me, from the things I read to my trip across the Northeast. That's why I feel a singular tenderness for that book. The subject also allowed me to write the kind of novel I've always wanted to write, an adventure novel, where the adventure is essential—not a purely imaginary adventure but one profoundly linked to historical and social problematics. That's probably why I consider *The War of the End of the World* my most important book. Of course, these kinds of judgments are always so subjective. An author isn't capable of seeing his work objectively enough to establish these kinds of hierarchies. The novel became a terrifying challenge that I wanted to overcome. In the beginning, I was very apprehensive. The colossal amount of research material made me feel dizzy. My first draft was enormous, certainly twice the size of the novel. I asked myself how I was going to coordinate the whole mass of scenes, the

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thousands of little stories. For two years, I was filled with anxiety. But then, I made the trip through the Northeast, throughout the Sertao, and that was the turning point. I had already done an outline. I had wanted to imagine the story first, on the basis of the research material, and then do the trip. The trip confirmed a number of things and offered new insights on others. A lot of people also helped me. Originally, the subject was not meant for a book but for a film directed by Ruy Guerra. At the time, Paramount in Paris was run by someone I knew who called me one day and asked me if I wanted to write the screenplay for a movie they were producing for Guerra. I had seen one of his movies, *Tender Warriors*, that I had liked very much; so I went to Paris and met him. He explained to me what he wanted to do. He told me what he had in mind was a story having to do in one way or another with the war at Canudos.[1] We couldn't make a movie about Canudos, the subject was too broad, but about something that was in some way related to it. I didn't know anything about the war at Canudos, I'd never even heard of it. I started to research it, to read about it, and one of the first things I read in Portuguese was *Os Sertões* by Euclides da Cunha. It was one of the great revelations in my life as a reader, similar to reading *The Three Musketeers* as a child, or *War and Peace*, *Madame Bovary*, and *Moby Dick* as an adult. Truly a great book, a fundamental experience. I was absolutely stunned by it; it is one of the greatest works Latin America has produced. It's a great book for many reasons but most of all because it's a manual for "Latin Americanism"—you discover for the first time what Latin America isn't. It isn't the sum of its imports. It's not Europe, Africa, pre-Hispanic America, or indigenous societies—but at the same time, it's a mixture of all these elements which

[1] In 1897, a large group of disaffected villagers led by the messianic preacher Antonio Maciel occupied the town of Canudos in the Brazilian Sertoa of Bahia. Under the control of Maciel, who was also known as "the Councelor," they declared the village an independent state. The uprising was finally put down by an expedition commanded by the Brazilian minister of war, after several other police and military efforts to suppress it had failed.

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coexist in a harsh and sometimes violent way. All this has produced a world that few works have captured with as much intelligence and literary marvel as *Os Sertões*. In other words, the man I truly owe for the existence of *The War of the End of the World* is Euclides da Cunha.

I think I read practically everything ever published about the war at Canudos up until that time. First, I wrote a screenplay for the movie which was never produced because of various problems it ran into, inherent to the film industry. The project reached a very advanced stage, production had already started, but one day Paramount decided the movie wouldn't be made and it wasn't. It was a disappointment for Ruy Guerra, but I was able to continue working on a subject that had kept me fascinated me for so long for a measly result—a screenplay isn't much after all. So I started to read again, to do research, and I reached a peak of enthusiasm that few books have inspired in me. I used to work ten to twelve hours a day on it. Still, I was afraid of Brazil's response to it. I worried it would be considered meddling in a private affair. . . . especially since a classic Brazilian writer had already covered the subject. There were some unfavorable reviews of the book, but on the whole, it was received with a generosity and an enthusiasm—by the public as well—that touched me. I felt rewarded for my efforts.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of the succession of misunderstandings that characterize Canudos: the republican partisans seeing in the rebels the upheaval of the monarchy and British imperialism, while the rebels themselves believed they were fighting the devil. Could one call this a metaphor of sorts for ideology?

VARGAS LLOSA

Perhaps that's where the value of Canudos lies for a Latin American because the reciprocal blindness produced by a fanatical vision of reality is also the one that prevents us from seeing the contradictions between reality and theoretical visions. The tragedy of Latin America is that, at various points

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in history, our countries have found themselves divided and in the midst of civil wars, massive repressions, massacres like the one at Canudos because of that same reciprocal blindness. Perhaps one of the reasons I was fascinated by Canudos is that the phenomenon could be observed in miniature, in the laboratory, as it were. But obviously, it's a general phenomenon: fanaticism and intolerance weigh heavily on our history. Whether it's messianic rebellions, socialist or utopian rebellions, or struggles between the conservatives and the liberals. And if it isn't the English at work, it's the Yankee imperialists, or the Freemasons, or the devil. Our history has been marked by our inability to accept differences of opinion.

INTERVIEWER

You wrote once that none of your other works had lent themselves as well to the chimeric ideal of the novel as this book. What did you mean by that?

VARGAS LLOSA

I think the novel as a genre tends toward excess. It tends towards proliferation, the plot develops like a cancer. If the writer follows a novel's every lead, it becomes a jungle. The ambition to tell the whole story is inherent in the genre. Although I've always felt there comes a moment when you have to kill the story so it won't go on indefinitely, I also believe that storytelling is an attempt to reach that ideal of the "total" novel. The novel I went the farthest with in that respect is *The War of the End of the World*, without a doubt.

INTERVIEWER

In *Mayta* and *The War of the End of the World*, you said you wanted to lie in full knowledge of the truth. Can you explain?

VARGAS LLOSA

In order to fabricate, I always have to start from a concrete reality. I don't know whether that's true for all novelists, but I always need the trampoline of reality. That's why I do research

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and visit the places where the action takes place; not that I aim simply to reproduce reality. I know that's impossible. Even if I wanted to, the result wouldn't be any good, it would be something entirely different.

INTERVIEWER

At the end of *Mayta*, the narrator tells us that the main character, now owner of a bar, has trouble remembering the events that are so important to the narrator. Did that really happen? Did the man really exist?

VARGAS LLOSA

Yes, he exists, though he isn't exactly what the book made of him. I changed and added a lot. But for the most part, the character corresponds to someone who was once a militant Trotskyite and was imprisoned several times. I got the idea for the last chapter when I spoke to him and was surprised to find that what I considered a crucial time in his life had become secondary to him—an adventure among others in a checkered life. It really struck me when I realized during our conversation that I knew more about the affair than he did. He had already forgotten certain facts and there were things he never even knew about. I think the last chapter is crucial because it changes the whole sense of the book.

INTERVIEWER

Tell us about Pedro Camacho in *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter* who writes serials for the radio and starts mixing up his own plots.

VARGAS LLOSA

Pedro Camacho never existed. When I started to work for the radio in the early fifties, I knew a man who wrote radio serials for Radio Central in Lima. He was a real character who functioned as a kind of script machine: He wrote countless episodes with incredible ease, hardly taking the time to reread what he'd written. I was absolutely fascinated by him, maybe because he was the first professional writer I'd ever known. But

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what really amazed me was the vast world that seemed to escape from him like an exhalation; and I became absolutely captivated by him when he began to do what Pedro Camacho does in the book. One day, the stories he wrote started overlapping and getting mixed up and the radio station received letters from the audience alerting them to certain irregularities like characters traveling from one story to the next. That's what gave me the idea for *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter.* But obviously, the character in the novel goes through many transformations, he has little to do with his model, who never went crazy. I think he left the station, took a vacation. . . . The ending was much less dramatic than the novel's.

INTERVIEWER

Isn't there also a kind of meta-language in the novel in the sense that Varguitas, who is modeled after you, lives a life as farcical as the lives of Camacho's serial characters?

VARGAS LLOSA

That's about right. When I wrote *Aunt Julia*, I thought I was only going to tell Pedro Camacho's story. I was already well into the novel when I realized it was turning into a kind of mind game and wouldn't be very believable. And, as I've said before, I have a kind of realism mania. So, as a counterpoint to the absurdity of the Pedro Camacho story, I decided to create another more realistic plot that would anchor the novel in reality. And since I was living a kind of soap opera myself at the time—my first marriage—I included that more personal story and combined it with the other, hoping to establish an opposition between a world of fantasy and one that is almost documentary. In the process of trying to achieve this, I realized that it was impossible to do when you write a piece of fiction, a hint of unreality always seeps into it, against the author's will. The personal story became as delirious as the other. Language itself is capable of transforming reality. So Varguitas's story has autobiographical elements in it that were profoundly altered, as it were, by contagion.

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INTERVIEWER

In several articles from recent years, you have made certain assertions that seem very pessimistic. In 1982, for example, you wrote: "Literature is more important than politics. Writers should become involved in politics only in the sense of opposing its dangerous schemes and putting them in their place." Isn't that a pessimistic vision of what politics can do to bring about progress?

VARGAS LLOSA

No. I meant that literature has more to do with what is lasting than politics do, that a writer cannot put literature and politics on an equal footing without failing as a writer and perhaps also as a politician. We must remember that political action is rather ephemeral whereas literature is in for the duration. You don't write a book for the present day; in order for a work to exert influence over the future, time must play its role, which is never or rarely the case for political actions. However, even as I say this, I never stop passing judgments on the political climate or implicating myself by what I write and what I do. I believe that a writer cannot avoid political involvement, especially in countries like mine where the problems are difficult and the economic and social situation often has dramatic aspects. It's very important that writers act in one way or another, by offering criticism, ideas, by using their imagination in order to contribute to the solution of the problems. I think it's crucial that writers show—because like all artists, they sense this more strongly than anyone—the importance of freedom for the society as well as for the individual. Justice, which we all wish to rule, should never become disassociated from freedom; and we must never accept the notion that freedom should at certain times be sacrificed in the name of social justice or national security, as totalitarians from the extreme left and reactionaries from the extreme right would have us do. Writers know this because every day they sense the degree to which freedom is necessary for creation, for life itself. Writers should defend their freedom as a necessity like a fair salary or the right to work.

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INTERVIEWER

But I was quoting your statement for its pessimistic view of what politics can do. Should or can writers limit themselves to voicing their opposition?

VARGAS LLOSA

I think it's important that writers participate, make judgments and intervene, but also that they not let politics invade and destroy the literary sphere, the writer's creative domain. When that happens, it kills the writer, making him nothing more than a propagandist. It is therefore crucial that he put limits on his political activities without renouncing or stripping himself of his duty to voice his opinion.

INTERVIEWER

How is it that a writer who has always shown a great distrust of politics became a candidate for the presidency of Peru in the 1990 elections?

VARGAS LLOSA

A country can sometimes find itself in a state of emergency, in a war for example, in which case there is no alternative. The situation in Peru today is catastrophic. The economy is foundering. Inflation has reached record highs. Over the first ten months of 1989, the population lost half its buying power. Political violence has become extreme. Paradoxically, in the midst of this enormous crisis, there appears to be the possibility of making great changes toward democracy and economic freedom. We can rethink the collectivist, socialist model for the state which has been used in Peru since 1968. We shouldn't miss this chance to restore what we've been fighting for these last years: liberal reform and the creation of a real market economy. Not to mention the renewal of the political culture in Peru responsible for the crisis that is sweeping the country. All these reasons made me overcome any reservations I had and lead to my involvement in the political struggle—a very naive illusion, after all.

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INTERVIEWER

As a writer, what do you think is your greatest quality and your biggest fault?

VARGAS LLOSA

I think my greatest quality is my perseverance: I'm capable of working extremely hard and getting more out of myself than I thought was possible. My greatest fault, I think, is my lack of confidence, which torments me enormously. It takes me three or four years to write a novel—and I spend a good part of that time doubting myself. It doesn't get any better with time, on the contrary, I think I'm getting more self-critical and less confident. Maybe that's why I'm not vain: my conscience is too strong. But I know that I'll write until the day I die. Writing is in my nature. I live my life according to my work. If I didn't write, I would blow my brains out, without a shadow of a doubt. I want to write many more books and better ones. I want to have more interesting and wonderful adventures than I've already had. I refuse to admit the possibility that my best years are behind me, and would not admit it even if faced with the evidence.

INTERVIEWER

Why do you write?

VARGAS LLOSA

I write because I'm unhappy. I write because it's a way of fighting unhappiness.

—Ricardo A. Setti
translated by Susannah Hunnewell

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from Orbit of Darkness

Ian MacMillan

Pripet Marshes, Northwest Ukraine, June 1944

Immaculate Conception

Ivan Pomorenko sat on a dry hummock near the mosquito-netted entrance to the bunker. Earlier he heard heavy vehicles moving, probably German, and assumed that they were building a temporary road somewhere to the north of the bunker. The marsh water had receded, and Pomorenko would have to move their hideout further in. He heard another soft moan from the entrance, and laughed bitterly—the Germans were killing everyone now because the front line was moving westward toward them and they now had to finish everything before leaving. In the past week alone he had gone out on sorties looking for food and information and had found tortured corpses; women and children and old men with their faces blasted away, partisans hanging from trees with their mouths full of flies and shiny ravens perched on their shoulders. Such was what became of their endless speculating about Ukrainian independence, and now all that was left was to kill before being killed. Even politics meant nothing. Only killing meant

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something. As long as there were two people killing independently, then there was a sort of Ukrainian independence. And he thought, no, one person killing.

And then, almost as if it were a vision from some perfect, earlier life, he saw her again: the side of her head with her cheek mashed onto the stock of the Mauser, and he with the field glasses, preparing to watch what seemed to him some cryptic scientific experiment, or some act of magic. A year ago, when she was sixteen, a year and a half. There was no sharpshooter anyone knew or heard of who shot with the accuracy that she did. Pomorenko would watch until she began to relax around the rifle, both eyes open, and then he would turn and look through the field glasses—the two watery circles would melt into one, and he would see the figure in green, or better, black or grey—he could even see the insignia on the chest and on the collar. Then he would wait. The air would be hollow and dead for a second, like a half-held breath, and it would explode with a powerful surge of sound and energy, after which there would be a pause where time would seem to stop as the bullet made its flight. He would focus his eyes in the liquid circle, and see the man's head explode. In the glasses he would clearly see the flying mist of blood and brain and hair, before the man crumpled in a heap to the ground. He would always turn and look again at her as she raised her face off the rifle stock, and he would see a wistful, hazy smile, almost as if she were in some very personal kind of trance, mesmerized by the beautiful silence that followed the shot.

Only very rarely did they have to go and check to make sure the men were dead, and then only when it was clearly safe. At these times Pomorenko would recall his father's advice: if they commit barbarities, you must commit worse ones when you can. The idea of it frightened Pomorenko, and he would find excuses to avoid getting too close to the corpses. One German had been fishing when Olenka Petrov shot him, in the upper body. Deciding it was safe, they approached him. He was dead, and Pomorenko decided that this time he should mutilate the corpse. He found he couldn't. With his hands shaking, he stuffed three mudfish into the soldier's slack mouth

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so that, lying on his back with the tails sticking up, he appeared to have died trying to swallow them. Then, laughing and nervous, like children pulling a nasty prank, he and Olenka Petrov ran back into the brush.

He heard the sound of moaning once more. He had no idea what he was supposed to do, and he imagined that, hungry as they were, the baby might be born dead, which was fine with him. When she admitted she was with child back before the winter, he took her to a woman he had heard about, who lived to the north in the deeper marshes, where there were seemingly endless stretches of shallow water, dotted only here and there by the boats and the fishermen with their conical nets. The woman lived in a thatched cottage in a wooded region of the marshes. She had no teeth, and she asked Olenka Petrov about the pregnancy, and Olenka Petrov told her that she had been with no man. Pomorenko laughed, and the woman studied Olenka Petrov's face carefully, and then the palms of her hands, and said that she believed her. She crossed herself and whispered into her closed fist, and then said that there would be no need for potions or for the knitting needle. Go and bear the child, she said.

Pomorenko told her that it was impractical.

"Are you a communist?" the woman asked. "A leftist?"

"I am a nationalist."

"All words ending the same," she said. "That was always the problem." Then to Olenka Petrov, she said, "Go and bear the child."

Pomorenko questioned Olenka Petrov later. "Was it one of the band members?" He remembered how crowded their little bunker would be from time to time, when various small bands of nationalists would be passing through.

But she said nothing. "A German soldier," he said. "A rape was it?"

She looked at him and said nothing.

"I don't care," he said. "I was only curious."

Pomorenko knew he had no reason to be angry. They were both soldiers and their job was to kill Germans and Bolsheviks and collaborators and leftist devotees to the cause of a com-

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munist puppet state. His father had told him that their cause was always doomed, but that the country's occupiers would also be doomed to pay for their arrogance, as long as there was left one soldier, whether a man or a woman or a boy or a girl. Pomorenko had been raised on the dream of independence, and when the Germans first came, there was a brief period of hope that they might allow them the fruits of this liberation. But eventually, with the occupation, each of those who spoke so often of independence ended up on the end of a rope with an open mouth full of flies, Pomorenko's father included. All speechmaking seemed to come only to that. A mouthful of flies.

Pomorenko stood up and brushed the chaff from his trousers, and waved mosquitoes away from his face. Again he thought he heard engines. If it was the Germans, then he'd have to watch for patrols. Olenka was useless, and right now, not movable either. Logic told him that he should kill her and move on by himself, but he couldn't. She was almost a child. If the Germans caught her, she might be spared because she was pregnant—she might also be tortured and killed in a crueller manner than he himself might do it.

He turned and went to the small opening of the bunker. It was situated at the base of a little grass-covered bank, not visible to the untrained eye. He stooped, pulled the netting away, and made his way inside. He opened his eyes wide in the damp blackness. He could smell her.

"I don't know what to do," she said. He stared at the sound of her voice.

"I don't either," he said. Now his eyes adjusted, and he began to perceive the rumpled form lying along the back dirt wall, the little mask of a pale face, and below, the enormous mound of her stomach.

"We'll have to move into the marsh," he said.

She had turned to the wall, and he could see that her hands were gripping the dirty blanket that covered her. He watched as she breathed steadily, and then he saw her feet moving, squirming in a kind of slow rhythm. This lasted around a

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minute, until she sighed and relaxed again. "I can't move," she said.

"You might have to. I heard engines."

"I can't."

He picked up his rifle and field glasses and left the bunker. He walked to the north, toward the sound of the engines. There was a village to the northwest where he could get food. The inhabitants had been afraid of the band Pomorenko was a part of, and always gave them something. His way there was over little rises in the marshland, through brushy thickets and heavy grasses rooted in mud. He knew his way because he had grown up here, and had spent the occupation walking these secret paths to points where he would commit acts of sabotage, and, with Olenka, eliminate Nazis. As he walked, he again recalled those times when he would watch her. In the spring he would stand behind her and watch her explode a man's head. She would be on her belly with her legs spread, and clad in a man's trousers and jacket, and he would see the strong shape of her buttocks and thighs, tense at first, and then her body slowly settling like a corpse around the rifle, her eye only a centimeter behind the black tube of the scope. That, he guessed, was her talent—total, mindless concentration—three hundred meters, and the man's head would explode in an expanding globe of pink mist.

But he rarely thought of her as a woman. When the bunker would be crowded with saboteurs and sharpshooters, liaison people from other bands talking independence, the air would be thick with the foul odors of bodies never washed, of the breath from empty stomachs and the peculiar, animal odor of fear. In that context she was as much a soldier as the rest, and when he had found out that she was with child, it was as if he had found that she had committed an act of treason. Pomorenko was realistic enough to reject any bitterness on his own part. She had been the perfect killer and now she was finished. She had sacrificed her freedom.

He was again aware of the sound of engines, and could see what he thought were wisps of smoke from the village houses.

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His stomach contracted in a slow, yawning cramp. Bread, a little milk perhaps. Fish if the people felt generous.

As he approached, he realized that the smoke was more than merely kitchen fires. He pulled the field glasses from the leather case slung on his shoulder. He put them to his eyes, and slid the wheel around toward focus, feeling the thick, oily resistance of the mechanism. The focus sharpened to a line of smoldering cottages, and in the left foreground, a wooden gallows beam with two men and a child, apparently a little girl, strung under it. He could even see the flies. He laughed. Beyond the gallows he could see movement, soldiers doing something. They were herding a little group of people out from the line of burning houses. Then they began shooting them. Pomorenko watched the first man fall and then waited, and heard the report. As a child he had been taught by his father how to gauge the distance of a lightning bolt by counting seconds—six-tenths of a kilometer in this case, more or less.

He would be getting no food at the village. The Germans were going to stay there and kill the people, rape the women, string up the children, play football with the babies, whatever. It didn't make any difference, except that he would be getting no food there. Pomorenko snorted. Making corpses was, after all, what this four-year game was all about. He pulled his rifle off his shoulder, thinking that he would lob a couple of rounds at them just to let them know that someone was alive, and thus put a fly in the ointment of their sense of completion. But he decided against it. Knowing that he wouldn't be able to hit anyone, he would spare himself the frustration. He was more or less weary of the whole thing anyway—in the spring when the snow melted they could smell carrion in the wind, no matter what direction it blew. It seemed to him that his whole life went this way, always starting each year with a spring of rotted corpses and fat, somnolent ravens laboring across the sky. This past year he finally understood that they would kill until they were killed, and like moths, or grubs, or mosquitoes, they would have fulfilled their mindless, obsessive reason for existing, and gone back to the earth. Like the reverse of procrea-

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tion, their function was to serve the cause of discontinuing the species.

Pomorenko left the Germans to their slaughter and made his way back toward the bunker. In a few hours, he knew, they would send patrols out in search of other old men and children to hang or shoot or torture according to their whims. He would have to move Olenka further into the marsh, no matter what she said.

When he got back to the bunker he could hear her moaning, and then he could hear a strange, alien sound, as if she were locked in a physical battle with some heavy object.

He worked his way into the bunker.

"Get away," she said. "No. Stay here. It's coming."

"What am I supposed to do?"

She groaned again, then breathed rapidly, and stopped. Pomorenko reached into his pocket for matches and a candle stump. He lit the candle and the bunker was full of yellow light. She was curled up under the blanket, lying on her back, and her face was flushed and bathed in sweat. Then she closed her eyes and strained, and her features shrunk inside a face bloated with the effort of straining. The skin around her eyes and on her forehead flushed almost purple, and suddenly Pomorenko realized the hopelessness of their situation—she would die, or not, but they would be found by the patrols sooner or later.

She sighed quickly, and then came out with an exasperated wail. "I'm all wet," she said. "Is it blood?"

"I don't know."

"Look."

Pomorenko bristled with embarrassment. "Look at what?"

She lapsed into the straining again, and then grabbed his wrist. She held it with such force that he was afraid he would yell with pain.

"Please."

Pomorenko pulled the blanket up, then moved slightly to allow the candlelight to illuminate her. She was lying on a dirty tarpaulin, which was stained with some clear liquid. "It's

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not blood," he said. She began to strain again, and he was locked in the grip of a kind of mute disgust—below the wet patch of hair he could see the opening suddenly widen in a quickly expanding circle, and then the circle seemed too wide. He began to tremble at the sight of it, as if her legs forming a V had suddenly receded and become small in the presence of the circle, inside of which he saw a patch of hair, scalp. That it was the baby came to him then. It was not some perverse nightmare. He said, "I see it, I see the top of its head."

The candle hissed, and then the circle closed up again. "I saw hair," he said. She puffed her face again, and there was, low in her throat, the sound of growling, like an animal, and the circle widened again, until her flesh went over the protrusion of the head. He began to see the temple, then part of an ear folded under, and on the top, the rapid pulsing of a depressed diamond-shaped area on the baby's skull. She pushed again, and the baby slid out in a sudden liquid rush, and without thinking he put his hands under it to prevent it from hitting the tarpaulin. It was hot, writhing, and when he pulled it away he saw the thick purplish grey corkscrew of cord. Olenka was up on her elbows, staring at it, her hair matted by sweat to her forehead and temples. Then the baby rasped fluid from its mouth.

"What do I do?" he whispered. "What—"

Olenka held the baby and tried to put it to her chest. "Scissors?" she said. "Give me the pack. The pack."

He made his way to the pack on his hands and knees, and the dirt of the bunker floor pasted itself to his hands.

"The midwife," she said. "She—"

He pushed the pack to her. "Cut this with the scissors. Then we need a string." The baby's rasping now became a rapid series of cries, and he could see it writhing on Olenka's chest, covered with a coating of slick oil, and patched here and there with a yellowish material.

He took the scissors and tried to cut the thick cord, but it slid away from the closing V of the blades. "I can't," he said.

"It's a girl—here." She took the scissors. Pomorenko turned away and crawled out of the bunker. Outside, he became sick

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to his stomach and vomited into the mud. Then he went to his pack and pulled out the canteen and drank water. He picked reeds of grass and chewed the taste from his mouth. He still trembled and felt dizzy and weak. He wondered if he should leave again, but passed the thought off. He had to do something with Olenka and the baby.

He went back into the bunker—in the candlelight he could see her sitting and looking into a little hood made from the blanket. He could hear it sucking. She drew in her breath, and whispered, "It tickles."

He crawled toward her, and his hand went down on something wet. He looked—there was a mound of purplish material connected to the severed cord. "What—what is—"

"It's afterbirth," she said. "Cows? Do you remember seeing it with cows?"

"May I see her?"

She pulled the hood away. He picked up the candle stump which now had a hard wax base like a flat dish made heavier by the dirt that clung to it. He held the candle up, and looked. Inside the hood, down at the end of the gentle sweep of her breast, he saw the little pinched features. The baby looked angry and concentrated on its sucking. Pomorenko saw the fine down on its forehead under the wispy blond hair, and above that, Olenka, her face held in an oddly distant look, as if she had pulled into herself and gathered her concentration around the sensation of the baby's physical contact with her. Pomorenko felt a strange stab of a kind of useless isolation, a distance from them, as if Olenka were not even aware of his presence.

He went outside. The best thing to do, he figured, was to wait until dusk and sneak into the marsh. For now, he would keep watch. His hands were sticky from that stuff on the bunker floor, so he went and rinsed them off in a pool of yellowish water dotted with little writhing mosquito larvae. When he looked up, he saw the flash of a figure in the brush about a hundred meters away. It was not an animal, it was a man, and he knew that they had been found, and would now be killed. Then he felt the presence of people in more than one direc-

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tion, and knew that flight was useless. They were all around, and closer than a hundred meters. He decided to sit at the entrance with his rifle.

He would not tell Olenka. Maybe they would do it quickly with her—one bullet, and then flatten the baby's head as they sometimes did. Pomorenko they would probably hang, as seemed customary. It struck him that he could give up, and they might not find her. He decided to casually move away from the bunker entrance to a hummock. When he got there he placed the rifle across his knees so that they could see it and therefore would shoot him rather than approach. He sat there feeling strangely empty, as if his hunger and discomfort had already left him. His heart beat lightly and high in his chest, and his stomach felt like air. There was nothing left to do but wait.

But the bullet that was supposed to explode his head didn't come, and he began thinking again of escape. There was a little ember of hope that he could have been mistaken, but he laughed, rejecting it, and looked at the ground, waiting.

Two figures entered his peripheral vision on his right, and he let the rifle slip off his knees and stood up to face them. Their uniforms were brown, and they pointed small automatic rifles at him. The soldiers were Russians. It made no difference. They would kill him.

One man, apparently an officer, approached him. He looked young, but had the sturdy, thickset look of a Ukrainian farmer. "Your name please?" he asked.

"Ivan Pomorenko."

"What is in the cave there?"

"What cave?"

Then he could see soldiers all around him, off in the brush, emerging from depressions in the landscape.

Two soldiers went to the bunker opening, each to a side. Pomorenko felt a sudden, almost blinding flash of rage, and walked to the bunker and pulled one of the men away. "No," he said. Both soldiers pointed their automatics at him, and a third went to the bunker opening. "No, you can't," he said. He felt as if he were dreaming, and sound itself, even his own

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voice, came to him as if from a distance. He grabbed the man by the arms from behind and threw him back from the opening, and then stood before it. "Go away," he said.

The thickset man who had spoken to him appeared before him. "We must look in there."

"No."

Then soldiers had him by the arms, and he tried to jerk free but could not. Olenka Petrov crawled from the bunker, holding the baby against her chest, her expression wide-eyed as if she were in shock, or blind. The thickset man gently pulled the blanket away, and whispered to other men who had materialized at his shoulders.

"Is the baby yours?" the man asked.

"Yes," Pomorenko said.

The man walked away to talk with other soldiers, and then came back, followed by an older soldier carrying a pack. The soldiers holding Pomorenko released him, and then stepped away from him. More soldiers came to look at the baby. The thickset man crooked his finger at Pomorenko, who went to him.

"You should probably scrape the mold off this," he said, gesturing toward Olenka. It was a block of cheese. "You can never be sure. This bread is as hard as wood. Put it in a bag, or wrap it in a blanket piece, and then sprinkle water on it and leave it for an hour or so."

"Who are you?"

"We are an advance unit of the First Ukrainian Army. Others will be here tomorrow." He looked around at the landscape, thinking. "You will stay here, if you don't mind, until we secure the area."

"I know where they are," Pomorenko said. "If you'd like I will show you—a village a half an hour from here. But they've killed everyone already."

"We've seen plenty of that," the man said. "Very well, but we'll rest first." He left to rejoin the soldiers.

Pomorenko stood holding the bread and cheese, staring around him. He was so confused that he began to shake, and his knees felt weak. His body ached horribly, as if he had

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pulled and torn all the muscles in his trunk. He had no idea what to do next.

Olenka sat at the opening of the bunker, peeking into the blanket. Then she drew her breath in quickly, and covered her mouth with her hand. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Look," she said.

He went to her and looked. There was a mosquito on the baby's face, which he waved away with the bread. "We must keep the mosquitoes off her," he said.

"No, the birthmark," she said. "On her side."

The birthmark was brown and the size of a fingernail. He waved the mosquitoes away from the baby's face.

"It looks like something," she said.

"Keep the mosquitoes off her," he said.

"Birthmarks are messages," she said ominously. "Aren't they?"

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Gertrude Stein

A Radio Interview

In 1934, Gertrude Stein returned to America after thirty-one years abroad, to lecture across the country on art and writing. Two weeks after she arrived she flew from New York to Chicago on her first plane ride. The Chicago Daily Tribune *reported that Carl Van Vechten – photographer of celebrities, novelist, popularizer of the Harlem Renaissance, old friend of Stein's and, not least, old hand at flying – had found it "the bumpiest ride I ever had." Stein was not at all fazed: "No, there is no sense of height or danger," she observed, "the air seems solid."*

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This was generally Stein's tone during the entire six-month lecture tour, that of seeing things for the first time, wide-eyed, the way a child can be but an adult is expected to have outgrown. In her own mind she perceived the tour as her great opportunity to persuade Americans to read the daunting pieces of writing she had been producing for the preceding thirty years. If only they would let her writing surprise them, as she let their America surprise her, they would have just as good a time as she was having.

That the tour of America was such an astounding success was perhaps the only thing that did not astonish Stein. It did astonish the newspapermen and women and the pundits who piqued everyone else's curiosity by their mystification. Thus Gladys Baker reported to her readers in the Birmingham News-Age-Herald*: "For the first time in my experience as a New York newspaper correspondent a celebrity has come to America whose right to fame defies analysis. . . . she has created as great a sensation as would the combined appearance, in their heyday, of Charles Lindbergh, Gene Tunney and 'Peaches' Browning."*

"To hear Miss Stein read her own work," another journalist wrote, "is to understand it—I speak for myself—for the first time. . . . you see why she writes as she does; you see how from sentence to sentence, which seem so much alike, she introduces differences of tone, or perhaps of accent. And then when you think she has been saying the same thing four or five times, you suddenly know that she has carefully, link by link, been leading you to a new thing."

Stein did not limit her propaganda campaign to the lectures. She freely trespassed on the journalists' own terrain. To the New York Herald Tribune *she contributed a series of newspaper articles in the spring of 1935 on American states and cities, food and houses, education, crimes and even American newspapers. (Stein knew how to keep the press interested: in an article in the* Springfield [*Massachusetts*] Union *headlined "Miss Stein Pays Her First Visit to Newspaper Office," the caption under a photograph of Stein examining some Associated Press dispatches adds: ". . . and is fascinated by the equipment of a city daily.") But most unusual perhaps were Stein's forays*

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into the new media—new at least for her—of radio broadcasting and talking pictures.

What follows is an interview, never before published, with NBC reporter William Lundell, which was conducted on November 12, 1934 on WJZ and NET radio. Stein's responses, like the questions she was asked, were written out prior to the broadcast.

—Stephen Meyer

INTERVIEWER

Coming back to the United States for the first time in thirty-one years, Miss Stein, is there anything in particular which has seized your interest?

STEIN

Coming back to the United States after thirty-one years everything seizes my interest and seizes it very hard. The buildings in the air and the people on the street they are all exciting and they are and I know it seems a funny thing to say but that is the way they appear to me, they are so gentle, so friendly, so simply direct and so sweet. I feel that way about the people on the street and I feel that way about the buildings in the air. By the way what I feel most about the buildings is the way they come down into the earth more than the way they go up into the air and they do it all so naturally and so simply. But the people on the street never could I have imagined the friendly personal simple direct considerate contact that I have with all of them. They all seem to know me and they all speak to me and I who am easily frightened by anything unexpected find this spontaneous considerate contact with all and any New Yorker touching and pleasing and I am deeply moved and awfully happy in it. I could tell so many incidents but charming as are the incidents it is the unreality of it the gentle pleasant unreality of it that makes my moving about in the street just a pleasure.

INTERVIEWER

Just yesterday Mr. Cerf told me a story in that connection,

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Miss Stein. After the party given in your honor by Random House and the Modern Library, Mr. Cerf was going down in the elevator and he talked with the elevator boy. The boy said, "You had a big party." Mr. Cerf replied "Yes, we had a lot of celebrities there. How did it strike you?" The boy said, "Well, I only recognized two of them . . . Miss Stein and Miriam Hopkins, the movie actress."

STEIN

Well, you see the sweet part of that was that we liked each other and asked each other's advice without really knowing who each other was. But in a way that is a joke because what is extraordinary is that in this the largest city in the world everybody knows me and I feel that I know everybody it is just exactly like the village in France where I spend my summers and where there are 20 families and they all know me and I know all of them. Why even at the football game a little boy came up to me and bowed and said please Miss Stein may I have an autograph. I said how old are you and he said twelve and we were both pleased, then everybody handed me their programs and it was perfectly charming, simply charming. Why when I first arrived off the boat the first evening I took a walk and I wanted an apple and I went into a little fruit store on Sixth Avenue to buy it, and the clerk said how do you do Miss Stein did you have a pleasant trip over.

INTERVIEWER

Your coming to the United States to lecture, Miss Stein, seems to me to imply that there are many people who will be able to comprehend your ideas. The current impression of your work, however, among American people, is founded largely upon the tremendous publicity attained by *Four Saints in Three Acts*, and although it may seem absurd in them, many American people doubt your ability to speak intelligibly. Just where, then, does *Four Saints in Three Acts* fit into your scheme of lecturing, which, if it is to be successful, must be at least understandable . . . which is more than most of us can say for your opera.

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STEIN

Look here, being intelligible is not what it seems, after all all these things are a matter of habit. Take what the newspapers say about what you call the New Deal. If you just know ordinary English you do not have the slightest idea what the newspapers are talking about everybody has their own English and it is only a matter of anybody getting used to an English anybody's English and then it is all right. After all when you say they do not understand *Four Saints* what do you mean, of course they understand or they would not listen to it. You mean by understanding that you can talk about it in the way that you have the habit of talking . . . putting it in other words . . . but I mean by understanding enjoyment. If you go to a football game you don't have to understand it in any way except the football way and all you have to do with *Four Saints* is to enjoy it in the *Four Saints* way which is the way I am, otherwise I would not have written it in that way. Don't you see what I mean? If you enjoy it you understand it, and lots of people have enjoyed it so lots of people have understood it. You see that is what my lectures are to be. They are to be a simple way of telling everybody this thing, that if you enjoy it you understand it and so if I am telling them this about why my punctuation is, why my so-called repetition is, what my prose is and what my poetry is and what my plays are and what my English literature is and what my pictures are and I am telling them all this simply as I tell everything you will see, they will understand it because they enjoy it.

INTERVIEWER

Well I think I understand. . . . Your life has been amazingly full of interest, it would seem, Miss Stein, judging from *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

STEIN

Yes, my life has been and is full of interest because I like it all it is all wonderful to me and one is not more wonderful than the other anybody anybody meets is wonderful and that is all there is to it and if you are wonderful and they are won-

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derful the world is full of interest and that is natural enough. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* I told all this one way, in *Portraits and Prayers* the book that is coming out and I am so pleased that it is coming out just as I am here I have told what it is in another way. You see in *Portraits and Prayers* are collected together all the portraits that I have made of anyone over all these years and what I mean by a portrait is this. When I know anybody well they are all something to me each one is. That is natural but then there has to come a moment when I know all I can know about anyone and I know it all at once and then I try to put it down to put down on paper all that I know of anyone their ways the sound of their voice the accent of their voice their other movements their character all what they do and to do it all at once is very difficult. Just anybody try to do it and you will see what I mean and in this book *Portraits and Prayers* I have tried to do it and I have done it in a great many ways and sometimes I have felt that I have done it. And you must not think that you do not understand because you cannot say it to yourself in other words. If you have something happen in you when you read these portraits you do understand no matter what you say to yourself and others about not understanding. Really and truly that is really and truly true.

INTERVIEWER

As you look back, Miss Stein, over these friends of whom you have done portraits, do any Americans stand out from among those told about in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and in your latest book, *Portraits and Prayers*?

STEIN

Yes, there are Americans in this book. There is everybody in this book everybody that has been in my life because after anybody has become very well known to me I have tried to make a portrait of them well I might almost say in order to get rid of them inside in me. Otherwise I would have got too full up inside me with what I had inside me of anyone. Do you see what I mean? Yes, there are lots of Americans in *Portraits and*

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Prayers and some of my favorite portraits in it are Americans, there is the second portrait of Carl Van Vechten, and there is one of Sherwood Anderson which I consider perhaps the best portrait I ever did and there is a little one of Hemingway and some of Americans you do not know and another one of an American I loved very much Mildred Aldrich of the Hilltop on the Marne which is there as *Mildred Aldrich Saturday*.

INTERVIEWER

Going back for a moment to your opera to be sung, *Four Saints in Three Acts*—I should like to ask if you sincerely believe that English literature can in any way be improved by such experimentation as you, Miss Stein, have made in *Four Saints in Three Acts*?

STEIN

There is no question of improving English literature, Lundell, there is only a question of English literature going on and now American literature going on and I do think that my work and *Four Saints in Three Acts* is an important part of it, is an important very important element in English literature's going on and naturally anybody who wants anything wants it to go on and my writing is part of its going on that is the way I feel about it.

INTERVIEWER

I'd like you to speak perfectly frankly, Miss Stein. What do you think of the writing now being done in the United States?

STEIN

The writing in the United States is going on and the young ones send me lots of manuscripts and a good many of them really know what writing is but you see what is necessary is that they should go on writing. Horace Greeley said about the resumption of specie payments after the Civil War that the only way to resume is to resume and that is the way with writing. The only way to go on writing is to go on writing and if you have anything in you it will be something but if you have

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not it will not but as there is undoubtedly a great deal in America that stirs me a lot coming here there will undoubtedly be a great deal in future American writing.

INTERVIEWER

While reading *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Miss Stein, I had an unusual reading experience because of your peculiar style, the words seemed to fly before my eyes. I read page after page with a kind of breathless haste. Just what in your style is responsible for this swiftness?

STEIN

The style of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is not peculiar at all. The only peculiar thing is that I wrote it myself. I suggested to my secretary Alice B. Toklas that she write her life story and she kept putting it off and finally to encourage her one day I sat down in the garden and wrote a chapter then it seized me so I kept on writing and writing sitting in the garden writing and I wrote the whole *Autobiography* in six weeks.

INTERVIEWER

And you didn't go over it to correct it at all?

STEIN

No, I didn't—I, I, just wrote it.

INTERVIEWER

But, Miss Stein, why did you omit capital letters so frequently and question marks?

STEIN

Well, because you see, Lundell, capital letters and question marks are useless. They are hangovers from the days when people didn't read very well, that all goes into the whole question of the life and death of punctuation marks, if you don't know that a question is a question without a question mark being there what is the use of writing the question.

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INTERVIEWER

Not much. You mean that question marks and capital letters are crutches for the mentally crippled?

STEIN

That is it exactly they are a help to some people but the average reading mind does not need them.

INTERVIEWER

But in addition to punctuation you seem to have very definite opinions about nouns and adjectives.

STEIN

I do, nouns are pretty dead and adjectives which are related to nouns which are practically dead are even more dead.

INTERVIEWER

But where is the life then in writing. In the verb?

STEIN

In the verbs there is life in the prepositions and adverbs too and very much in the conjunctions. As an example the most vigorous expression in American speech is that composed of two words—"And how." It is full of emotion and it says everything that needs to be said.

INTERVIEWER

But your study in these slang phrases, it would seem to me, must be rather limited. In your literary circles you don't meet much new and vigorous slang.

STEIN

Oh, don't I. How do you know I do not. And what makes you think I only talk to literary circles. I talk to and listen to anybody. Whom did I talk to during the war? And everyday I talk to my cab drivers and my publishers.

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INTERVIEWER

You apparently find American speech very vigorous then?

STEIN

Oh, yes. American speech is very vigorous, more vigorous than English. English speech is dead and if the speech of the people is dead then the literature is dead. When a country is in transition and growing its speech is vigorous and its literature is vigorous and alive. In the Elizabethan days in England that was a most lively period and the language was growing and the language was vigorous.

INTERVIEWER

Would that then mean, Miss Stein, that because of the vigor of Greek life in the days of Sophocles and of Roman life in the days of the Caesars that Greek and Latin are not dead languages but very much alive?

STEIN

Certainly they are alive. The literature of any language that was once alive is never dead but the English of modern writers is not in a state of vitality. Since the death of Swinburne, Browning and Meredith there have been no first rate writers in English, just second and third rate and that isn't anybody's fault but England's it has lost its vitality.

INTERVIEWER

But what of our younger American writers?

STEIN

Young writers are young writers, you can't judge a writer until all of his work is behind him.

INTERVIEWER

But then how are we to know what books to buy and what is the value of a book reviewer if we can't judge an author's value until his work is finished?

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STEIN

The function of a book reviewer is to review and that is alright.

INTERVIEWER

Well, then, to get back to your own writing again, Miss Stein. Will you explain the passage from *Four Saints in Three Acts* about the pigeons on the grass which begins, "Pigeons on the grass alas. Pigeons on the grass alas. Short longer grass short longer longer shorter yellow grass," and ends up, "Lily Lily Lily let Lily Lucy Lucy let Lily. Let Lucy Lily."

STEIN

That is simple I was walking in the gardens of the Luxembourg in Paris it was the end of summer the grass was yellow I was sorry that it was the end of summer and I saw the big fat pigeons in the yellow grass and I said to myself, pigeons on the yellow grass, alas, and I kept on writing pigeons on the grass, alas, short longer grass short longer longer shorter yellow grass pigeons large pigeons on the shorter longer yellow grass, alas pigeons on the grass, and I kept on writing until I had emptied myself of the emotion. If a mother is full of her emotion toward a child in the bath the mother will talk and talk and talk until the emotion is over and that's the way a writer is about an emotion.

INTERVIEWER

But how is the reader supposed to know what you are thinking about?

STEIN

The reader does know because he enjoys it. If you enjoy you understand if you understand you enjoy. What you mean by understanding is being able to turn it into other words but that is not necessary. As I said before, to like a football game is to understand it in the football way.

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INTERVIEWER

You saw the Yale-Dartmouth game a week ago Saturday, didn't you? Did you understand that in the American way or the football way or how?

STEIN

In the American way. The thing that interested me was that the Modern American in his movements and his actions in a football game so resembled the red Indian dance and it proves that the physical country that made the one made the other and that the red Indian is still with us. They just put their heads down solemnly together and then double over, while on the side lines the substitutes move in a jiggly way just like Indians. . . . Then they all get down on all fours just like Indians.

INTERVIEWER

But those jiggles are warming-up exercises.

STEIN

It doesn't make any difference what they are doing it for, they are just doing it, like the way the Indian jiggles in the Indian dance and then there is that little brown ball they all bend down and worship.

INTERVIEWER

But the idea in that is to get the ball across the goal line.

STEIN

But don't you suppose I know that, and don't you suppose the Indians had just as much reason and enjoyed their dancing just as much?

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps so. But permit me, Miss Stein, to ask you to explain the lines entitled *A Portrait of Carl Van Vechten*. I don't understand them. Will you read them?

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STEIN

"If it and as if it, if it or as if it, if it is as if it, and it is as if it and as if it. Or as if it. More as if it. As more. As more as if it. And if it. And for and as if it." That is a portrait of Carl Van Vechten. He is just like that sometimes this way sometimes that way he is sometimes very real and then very unreal sometimes alive sometimes not alive.

INTERVIEWER

But what about this fifth paragraph?

STEIN

"Tied and untied and that is all there is about it. And as tied and as beside, and as beside and tied. Tied and untied and beside and as beside and as untied and as tied and as untied and as beside." Well, just look at these words, the words look like Carl Van Vechten, anybody can know that beside they mean Carl Van Vechten anybody can know that.

INTERVIEWER

Well, that's rather hard for us normal Americans to see.

STEIN

What is a normal American, there are lots quite normal who do see. And how. But after all you must enjoy my writing and if you enjoy it you understand it. If you did not enjoy it why do you make a fuss about it? There is the real answer.

—interviewed by William Lundell

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Three Poems by Attilio Bertolucci

The Months

Read in Emile Mâle the fact that the sculptors of the North
in their series of months make September the thresher
in Italy they make July.
But here at a thousand metres and more in the Apennines
hasn't time come round again with summer
beaten back and gone down to the plain
like a holidaymaker sick of cloudy noons?
Then clearness returns with respites long and blue
so that they can scarcely thresh the ripe grain
with all the blackberries and nuts that bound the space
of small rain-blackened fields
refuge of quails questioning one another in the grey-blue
zinc of dawn. Now it is afternoon and slow
to pass measured by the dial
of the tiny engine
of a threshing machine in miniature come from Toscanella
that stands spread out behind the inaccessible ridge and takes
its warmth from the sea. One's heart grows calm again and beats
regular with the beating
of the ears of wheat as this rural fatigue or feast advances
to the end of the millennium which opens with the months of France.

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Near Shrine B on an August Day

Today I shall not take the Riana road
cut lately into a tender flank of hill
blood-red with beeches, trickling with tiny streams;
today I shall not take the new, the not yet finished road
torn for the public good
from the tight fistedness of owners of land and woodland,
facing the future, blue with its pools of rain;

for it is Sunday and the stone-strewn
ruinous mule-track calls me towards Montebello
fortified above the Bratica, on its guard,
useless breeder now of kin and clergy,
wooded round with chestnut trees,
first providers once of food to these
hill-folk here; now—Sunday at August's end—
dense with fruits that no one eyes
anxious for their fullness, even though the skies
gashed here and there by pre-autumnal blades
tell us, in the heat of the day,
of an approaching season no longer mild.

As I press on, sure of finding
no one along the abandoned way,
with its magpies white and black against the dusky gold
of decaying dungheaps, snakes
driven away by drought, soon lost to the eye
but not to the mind tortured by sin,
I hear the last bell-strokes of mass and hurry on
afraid I shall be followed and held back
from entering the track that leads uphill,
hardly visible beneath the leaves, the stones,
which encumber its tremulous line, for years
on years despised and desecrated.

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Now, arrived obliquely here, I feel
the hesitation of both foot and heart
as, from above, there plunges, striking the hour of fire,
an avalanche of blue that keeps back autumn;
and on the other side, sinister in both senses,
in the shade of vegetation
gnaws the beetle which survives
on the death of timber. I hesitate no longer, turn
my steps beyond
the space that held me there in doubt
and is already behind me, pitiless
with sun—I, surrendered unresisting now
to the tawny dark, the organic
sickly sweet oppression of the wood
where there awaits me, guilt
and penitence, sole good,
the youthful mother.
It was you I was searching for and did not think to find
within such easy reach
of all those, travellers
or exhausted woodsmen going by,
who seek for cover and for comfort.
Indeed, this shrine in whose presence I now stand,
gained with such uphill labour, offers itself
suddenly to the eye, dilapidated
(yet the only one whose jutting, tiny shed
could, in time of tempest, keep you dry),
to all who clamber up and cannot miss
its unwonted bulk among the other roadside shrines
encountered here and there, humble
with scribbled signatures, scarred by children.

But I must rejoice, not fall
into vague regrets, knowing that
this place of worship set apart, almost beyond my reach
who came here by the pathway of the dead,
guided by memory, the bitter privilege

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of him all too eager to throw away his joys,
absolves our debt, human, and so gentle at its work
of protection for the body and the soul,
if one does not seek but finds it by the wayside,
open to all, though now without a name.
No one, I see, has brought up stones and mortar
or fine sand from the clear banks
of the Bratica that flows below
through its long, deep earth-wound; no one
has put pack and saddle
onto his ass and led it up
by that laborious track
it takes the patience of a beast
to follow—a day of labour
robbed from the miserly concerns
of ownership; no one from Casarola, nor by chance
from equidistant Montebello, of his own free will
or exalted from on high
from a pulpit never tired of making claims
on others, has restored this one that is still
the most beautiful of mountain shrines
and (it may be) became so out of our vanity.
Yet, passing by this place
someone has set in order
stones fallen from the drystone wall
enclosing it; another—the same, who knows?—
forgetful of self within the calm embrace
of this portico of peace,
port of shade,
has put the slates to rights
that were sliding from its roof, so that at least
rain cannot enter. And there are yet
some flowers or fruits,
but wild ones and so shrivelled that they fit
the broken fingers of the child,
the adolescent neckline
of the mother's dress.

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It will last, this rustic masonry,
as long as the pain and piety
of those who go on living on these heights
that we are abandoning.
And the violence of my heartbeats
is not justified, nor is my choice
and profanation of the hour of mass
for so private a visit, a devotion
solitairy and egoistic as a vice.
Scrub and stone, show me
a passage through to set me free,
and let me find once more
a beaten path, open
and perfumed by a heady multitude
of wild carnations that the morning
displays along its banks, the sun
wakes early and already has begun
to fade a little, sprightly as they are
lacking both memory and hope,
as it prepared—noonday
now coming on—to draw away
leaving them warmth and illumination still.

Note: "B" in the title stands for Bertolucci. The phrase "out of our vanity" also refers to that family.

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Eliot at Twelve Years

from a photograph

Today a cold wind travels the earth,
not arid, parching as later it will be,
dragging leaves from branches with a sound
that imitates inferno, prepares purgatory

and its autumnal somnolence. This
is March with a sun that forces you
to narrow your deep dark-violet eyes
over which the hair hangs untidily down

as far as is permitted or required
by a New England etiquette in exile
on southern shores: and you will never try
to combat it openly. To overcome it—

if today the bitter adolescent mouth
signifies such an aim and task while here
against a brick wall the photographer
feigns your execution and your knees

grow guiltily languid in the warmth
of the season and your youth—and once overcome
to leave it empty on the shores of time,
and shining, will mean to live and write

till inclement January, till the bones' own winter.

—translated from the Italian
by Charles Tomlinson

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Len Roberts

More Walnuts, Late October

Another fall dusk and I was out
with my son to pick up
the fallen walnuts, holding them to
his nose and
my nose to draw the bitterness in,
smearing the brown stain on our hands
when I remembered the yellow-brown whorls
of my father's fingertips
those nights on Olmstead Street as he
poured coins
onto the glittering table, the cigarette
smoke turning
his pock-marked face blue, covering his
eyes with clouds
I could not see through. I wrapped
peanut butter
and jelly sandwiches at the white counter,
folded the waxed paper
in neat triangles the way he had taught me,
then dropped them
into the brown bag gently for the long day
of flash cards
and blue-lined maps tomorrow. And that day came,
and another, another, until
even the rain on the windows and the Christmas
plays and the nights
of polishing shoes in the cellar blurred and
finally disappeared, year

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after year taking away one of the songs he
played in those five o'clock gray
evenings, the words fading slowly from Tommy
Edwards' The Other
Side of the Mountain and Please Love Me Forever
until only a few
scattered lines remained, a wordless humming
that floated
over the emptiness, the blank spaces, brought
me here to the swishing
of my son's feet through freshly fallen leaves,
and the sudden, always unexpected thud of
walnuts dropping from the bare, black boughs.

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August Kleinzahler

Rubble

I

The big claw takes its angle
and drives down hard,
shivering Kezar's concrete bleachers

raises up and drops again,
half a section crumbling into rubble

McElhenny shakes a tackle,
cuts back hard against the grain,
returning a punt for six

A thirty year old TV clip
stirring the mind's phosphors
as the claw slams down one final time—

a scatback's moves flickering in amber

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II

After the big shake chimney rubble
at the foot of the block,
and tributaries of Amaretto and Schlitz
winding through broken glass
outside the liquor shop

Then sirens
and the sky full of helicopters circling
the vast smoking feed

Two days of soft weather
and now rain
soaking poppies and sweet alyssum, jasmine
blooming along the fence
where we'd woven its shoots all summer

The old hippie will be back
with the sun, used albums fanned out
in front of the deli,
and the garbage truck will wake us at dawn,
men slamming down cans and cursing

But the earth continues to wobble,
and the cat keeps to his odd new perch
on top of the mantel,
that same fierce look in his eyes

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Luc Sante

Autobiography

All this happened when I was young:

I stopped knowing anybody. I waited for somebody to know me. I knew most of my strangers in depth; acquaintanceship stifled this; strangeness had to be the bond. Maybe I was too small to be seen. I certainly couldn't recognize myself, in windows, for example. I was a stranger, surrounded by other, loving strangers. These others were glossy and knowing: we had everything in common in this dream way. The talking would criss-cross forever, activity propelled it, and affection nurtured it. They were all seated above my monkey life, serenely unaware, walking with great strides through my walls. I could only gape. On my surface, everything moved strictly behind my back. It would take the merest suggestion of interest on my part for things to stop dead. Beyond their beauty they had a large investment in spite.

I decided to wait. This seemed like a sensible decision. I had nothing but time. Dust settled as I waited and waited. Time passed and nothing moved except the decay of things, relentless but so slow I was only aware of details missing from the general prospect. What was lost gradually returned as dust and refuse that I felt sure I would happily discard if only I wasn't bound to the wait. I thought the reward for my persistence would be the arrival of some kind of train. The minutes stretched into years and I was still at my post. The weather would drift and return, buildings were torn down and new ones put up. I slowly grew to doubt the arrival of the train, or the existence of the track, or the idea of a destination. I was rooted to my post, without any notion of what eventuality I

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was guarding. The earth spun idly on its axis. I kept on, what else was there to do. Tides shifted, the moon shrank, the stars grew cold and died. My skin cells rubbed off and regenerated, again and again, and still I waited.

I became nostalgic for things I couldn't remember: my former life, houses in which I might have lived. When I was young I lived in terror. I lived nowhere. I assumed the lives of the unknown as my life. They would know me if only they saw how I resembled them. Later I grew nostalgic and took their lives as my memory. When I was young I was invisible, but waiting had lent me a body. It was the wrong one, couldn't be returned, so I longed for the body I never was. When I was *young I grew nostalgic; I knew that I was older than myself.* Now that I had waited and nothing had come, I resented the future. The ground froze and thawed. Something stuck on my tongue; memory couldn't be dislodged from the back of my mind. When I was young I was another. I looked at the wrong party in the mirror.

Now I knew my mistake, and I gathered my phantoms and waited with them. The talking dissolved into specks. Eventually, I would materialize. I would wait, and my youth would arrive. I settled down to wait for myself to appear, walking with great strides through the walls.

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Billy Collins

Going Out for Cigarettes

It's a story as famous as the three little pigs:
one evening a man says he is going out for cigarettes,
closes the door behind him and is never heard from again,
not one phone call, not even a postcard from Rio.

For all anyone knows, he walks straight into the distance
like a line from Euclid's notebooks and vanishes
with the smoke he blows into the soft humid air,
smoke that forms a screen, smoke to calm the bees within.

He has his fresh pack, an overcoat with big pockets.
What else does he need as he walks beyond city limits,
past the hedges, porch lights and empty cars of the
suburbs
and into a realm no larger than his own hat size?

Alone, he is a solo for piano that never comes to an end,
a small plane that keeps flying away from the earth.
He is the last line of a poem that continues off the page
and down to a river to drag there in the cool flow,

questioning the still pools with its silver hook.
Let us say this is the place where the man who goes out
for cigarettes finally comes to rest: on a river bank
above the long, inquisitive wriggling of that line,

sitting content in the quiet picnic of consciousness,
nothing on his mind as he lights up another one,
nothing but the arc of the stone bridge he notices
downstream, and its upturned reflection in the water.

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Linda Pastan

1932-

I saw my name in print the other day
with 1932 and then a blank
and knew that even now some grassy bank
just waited for my grave. And somewhere a grey

slab of marble existed already
on which the final number would be carved—
as if the stone itself were somehow starved
for definition. When I went steady

in high school years ago, my boyfriend's name
was what I tried out, hearing how it fit
with mine; then names of film stars in some hit.
My husband was anonymous as rain.

There is a number out there, odd or even
that will become familiar to my sons
and daughter. (They are the living ones
I think of now: Peter, Rachel, Stephen.)

I picture it, four integers in a row
5 or 7, 6 or 2 or 9:
a period; silence; an end-stopped line;
a hammer poised . . . delivering its blow.

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James Poolos

To Sleep

Field is frozen, it doesn't move
even as snow starts to cover it.
Nothing grows there.
I throw a shadow twice my size.

It is no different where I sleep.
The women gather their bracelets
and leave. Carrying their shoes,
they walk quietly so as not to wake me.

When I dream
the women will be walking.
They'll spread a white sheet, and disappear.
They'll split the surface so the air flows through.

All of the trees will gather into a fan.
They'll bring their water with them.
It will take a long time
for the earth to become a hand.

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Portfolio

Studies for Amerika: For the People of Bathgate

Tim Rollins and K.O.S.

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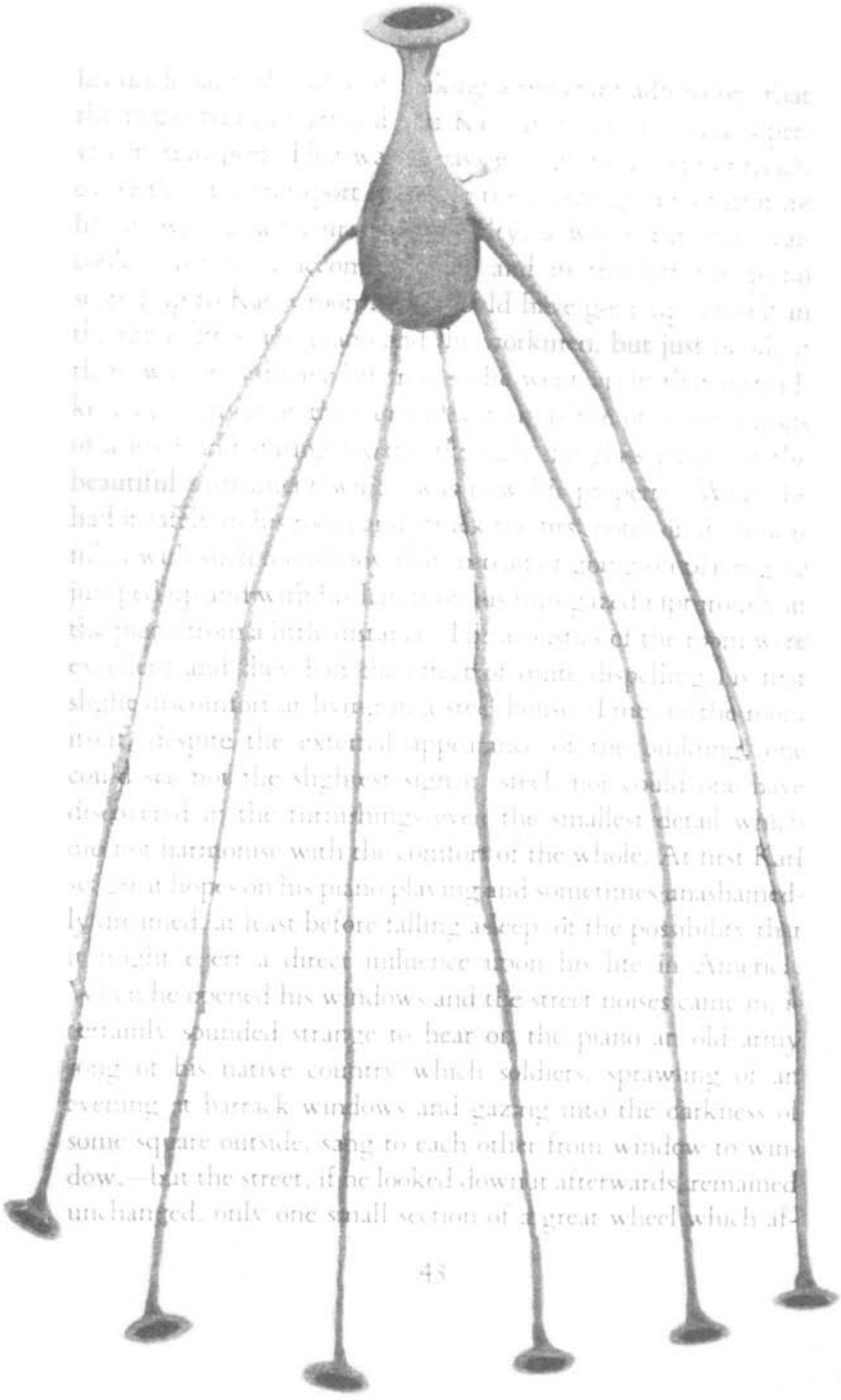

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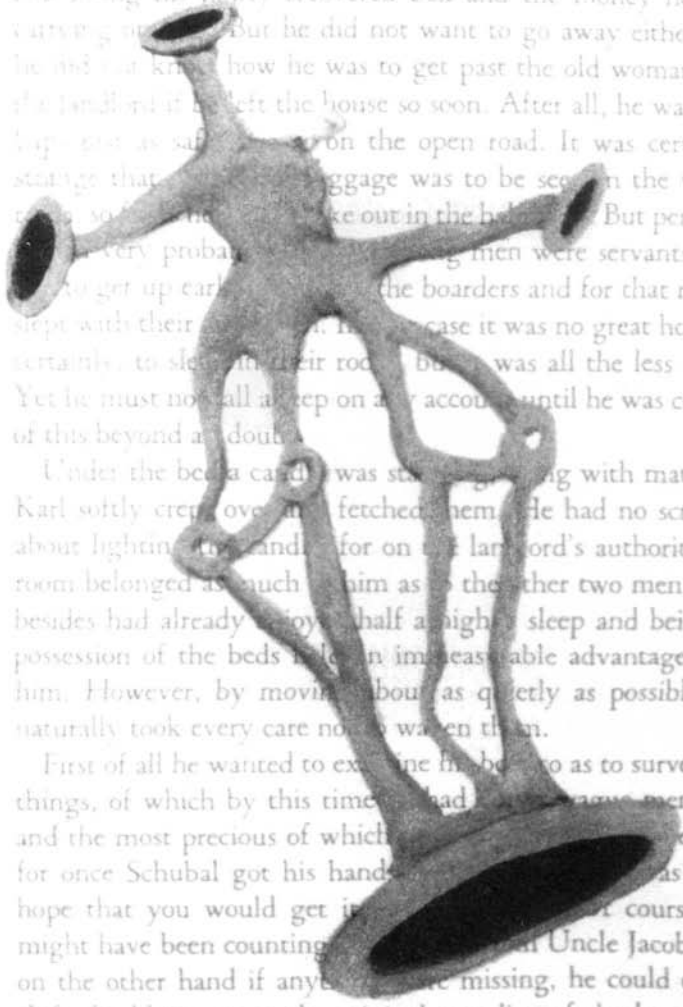

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from her, she came up to their table, planted both hands on it and asked: "Who is paying?" Never did hands shoot out more quickly than those of Delamarche and Robinson as they pointed at Karl. Karl was not taken aback, for he had foreseen this, and he saw no harm in paying the whole bill for his comrades from whom he expected a return, although it would certainly have been more than enough to discuss the matter frankly before the crucial moment. All that troubled him was that he would just have to take the money out of the secret pocket, but he had intended to save that money in case of emergency for himself, as it were, for a few days, which he held over them through concealing money and above all through concealing it, laughed by the fact that they had lived in A childhood they had simple skills finally not to be not as than the present circumstances. Karl's original money, then, need not be affected by paying the bill now, since after all he could spare a quarter dollar; he could simply lay the quarter on the table and say that that was all he had, and that he was willing to with it to get them all to Butterford. For a journey a quarter should But he did not know whether he had enough small change and anyhow his change was beside the wad of banknotes in the secret pocket, where it was difficult to get hold of anything without emptying the whole lot on to the table. Besides, it was quite unnecessary for his companions to know anything about the secret pocket at all. But, however, his friends seemed to be much more interested in the waitress than in how Karl was to produce the money for the bill. Delamarche, under cover of asking her to make out the bill, had

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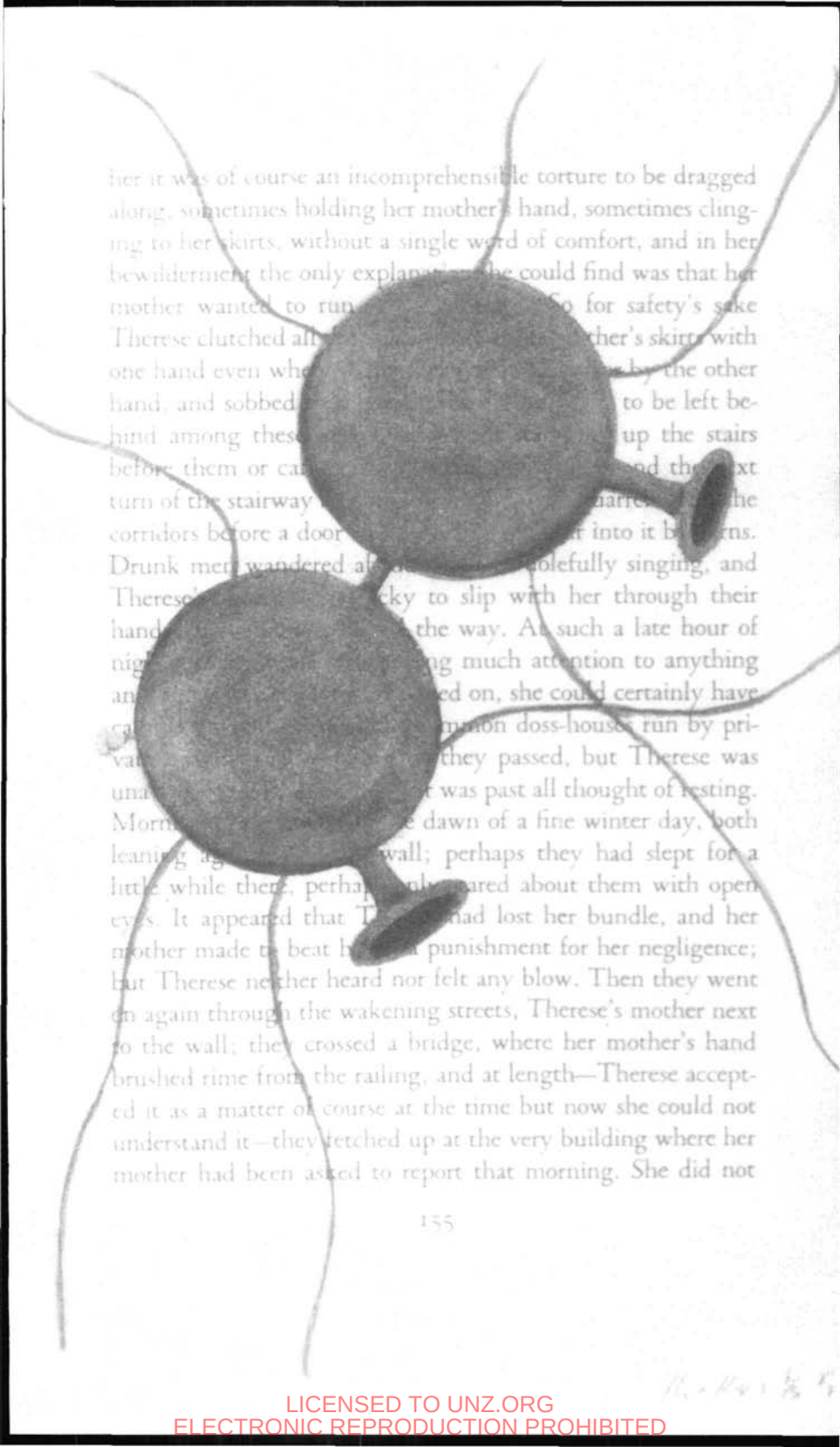

her it was of course an incomprehensible torture to be dragged along, sometimes holding her mother's hand, sometimes clinging to her skirts, without a single word of comfort, and in her bewilderment the only explanation she could find was that her mother wanted to run [illegible] for safety's sake Therese clutched aff[illegible]ther's skirts with one hand even wh[illegible] by the other hand, and sobbed [illegible] to be left behind among thes[illegible] up the stairs before them or ca[illegible]d the next turn of the stairway [illegible]he corridors before a door [illegible] into it b[illegible]rns. Drunk men wandered al[illegible]olefully singing, and Therese [illegible]cky to slip with her through their hand[illegible] the way. At such a late hour of nig[illegible]g much attention to anything an[illegible]ed on, she could certainly have ca[illegible]mon doss-houses run by pri- va[illegible] they passed, but Therese was un[illegible] was past all thought of resting. Morn[illegible]e dawn of a fine winter day, both leaning a[illegible]wall; perhaps they had slept for a little while there, perha[illegible]ared about them with open eyes. It appeared that T[illegible]had lost her bundle, and her mother made to beat h[illegible] punishment for her negligence; but Therese neither heard nor felt any blow. Then they went on again through the wakening streets, Therese's mother next to the wall; they crossed a bridge, where her mother's hand brushed rime from the railing, and at length—Therese accepted it as a matter of course at the time but now she could not understand it—they fetched up at the very building where her mother had been asked to report that morning. She did not

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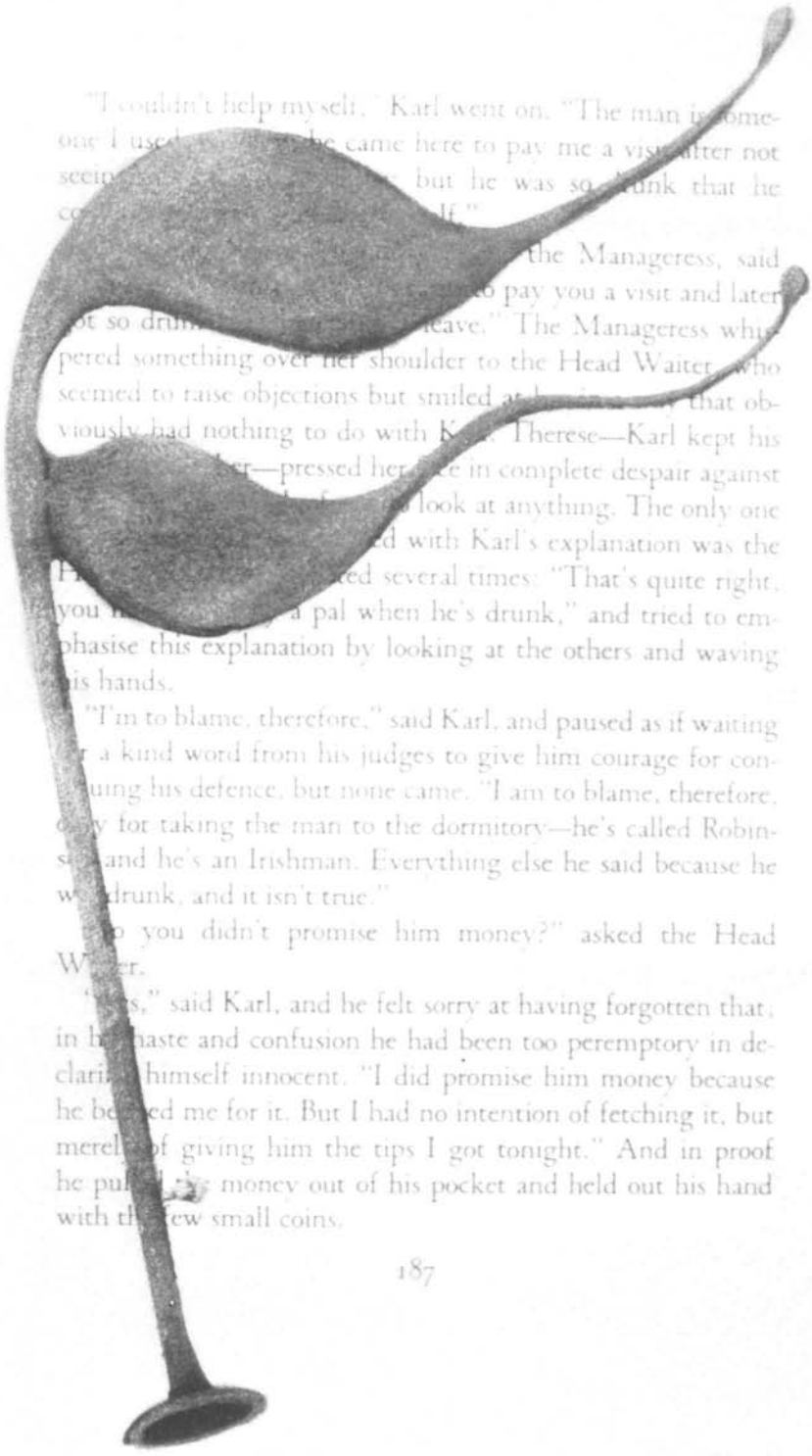

"I couldn't help myself," Karl went on. "The man is someone I used [illegible] he came here to pay me a visit after not seeing [illegible] but he was so drunk that he co[illegible]lf."

[illegible] the Manageress, said [illegible] to pay you a visit and later [illegible] got so drun[illegible] leave." The Manageress whispered something over her shoulder to the Head Waiter, who seemed to raise objections but smiled at [illegible] that obviously had nothing to do with K[illegible]. Therese—Karl kept his [illegible]er—pressed her [illegible]e in complete despair against [illegible] look at anything. The only one [illegible]d with Karl's explanation was the H[illegible]ed several times: "That's quite right, you [illegible] a pal when he's drunk," and tried to emphasise this explanation by looking at the others and waving his hands.

"I'm to blame, therefore," said Karl, and paused as if waiting for a kind word from his judges to give him courage for continuing his defence, but none came. "I am to blame, therefore, only for taking the man to the dormitory—he's called Robinson and he's an Irishman. Everything else he said because he was drunk, and it isn't true."

"So you didn't promise him money?" asked the Head Waiter.

"Yes," said Karl, and he felt sorry at having forgotten that, in his haste and confusion he had been too peremptory in declaring himself innocent. "I did promise him money because he begged me for it. But I had no intention of fetching it, but merely of giving him the tips I got tonight." And in proof he pulled the money out of his pocket and held out his hand with the few small coins.

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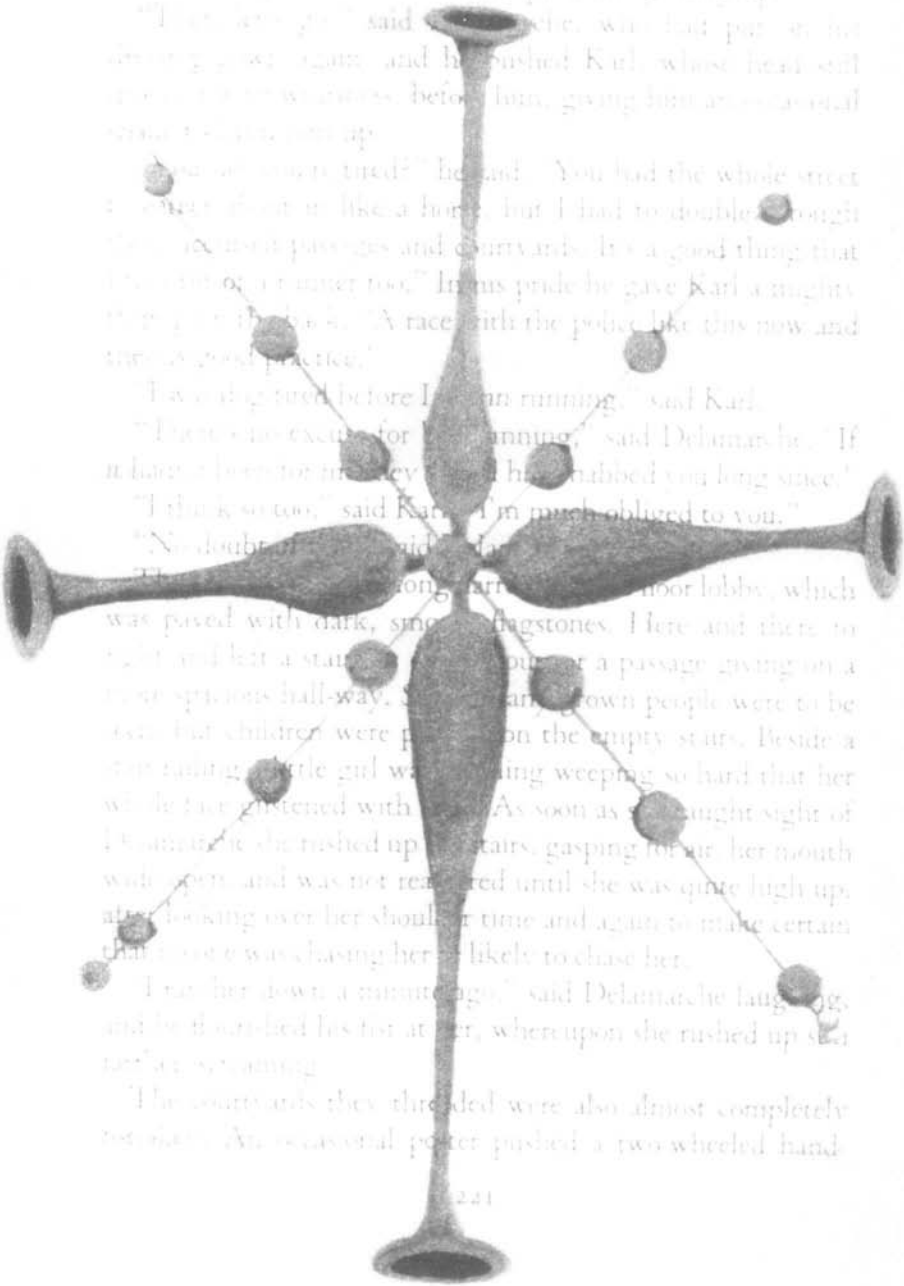

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A Bestiary

Bradford Morrow

WHALE

Before the dawn of history, when the earth was still flat and the oceans ran out to the edges and fell off into space, back so far in time the sun had not yet risen, the world was a very dark place, so dark that the sea and sky seemed all the same. In that olden era the whale roved the wind, spurning the sea, as he had no desire to be wet. He ranged through the unlit clouds with birds now long extinct, some of which looked like forks and spoons, some like staple guns. He basked in moonglow which darkened his skin to a pale gray, and stargazed, and bothered no one else who made his home in the heavens. Only the mariners who set forth from the land to discover the ends of the earth found the whale to be a problem. What little light came from the moon and stars, light by which they tied their ancient knots and fixed their rigging, was obscured whenever the great, slow blimp of a whale passed over. Enough, said these sailors, and brought him down with nets, hoping to drown him in the ocean beneath their bow. What happened next we all know, as now of course the whale we think of as only in the sea. True, he didn't notice the difference much,

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and came to love the feeling of water on his flesh. The splash he made when the mariners caught him caused the waterfall edges of the earth to crumble, and the ocean rolled in rivers, and the earth became round. In this way, without even meaning to, the whale behaved less like a blimp or bird or any other thing which roams the sky than a god, for he helped to fashion the world in his own image.

SKUNK

Here is the poor skunk. He is marked and marred. He is blacker than hindgut mud. He loves his blackness and he hates his stripes. He wishes the snow on his hot black back would melt. He wishes the comet in his iron-dark night would fly forever away. He would give his soul for an hour of berry blackness. In an hour of black he would be prized as mink. In an hour of black he'd be royal as raven, this witch-black, alley-black cat of a skunk. For an hour of black he'd make a pact. He would give up the thing besides black he loves best. The sweeter-than-lily scent that protects him. The scent he so trusts, he would trade it off. Is there no one who would give up her black, her shadow or shade for some virgin white? White and a drop of satanic perfume?

ANEMONE

Hold your breath and see the anemone, down by the high-tide pilings in the wharf, a flowerlike, ghostlike, windlike creature, ἄνεμος, jelly buttercup whirly and whorling. It behaves like flora in its fauna limbs, it floats like helium in its water world. Dulse and ribbonweeds sway with its sea leaps, mussels and whelks sit beside it when it rests. It has few enemies, the anemone; and melts when touched.

The oceans support so many ghosts, many flowers and many winds, but none is more vegetable than this air, none more dancing than this music, the music of the origami umbrella's name, anemone of the ways, translucent breeze.

Anemone, anemone.

Breathe.

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THE MONKEY PRINCE

Many millennia ago the young son of a certain king fell in love with a beautiful girl, who happened also to be a witch, and as well the daughter of the king's most hated enemy. The boy kept his love a secret for a long time, and was seen as spoiled and strange when he refused to take any bride for himself from among the hundreds of girls in the land, but finally he gave in to the continuous pressures of his father, and married. Because the subjects throughout the kingdom found it in their hearts to be concerned with such matters (in olden times there was so much *less* to do), great relief spread even as did the news of this royal betrothal, and everyone of age and quality found the boy's decision satisfactory; it was possible again for all to slip back into their own lives and the routines of the seasons.

However, the beautiful witch, who lived with her father in the woods, was disgusted by the prince's act of capitulation, and cast a spell on him on his wedding day. She turned the capitol of the kingdom into a grungy, terrifying forest and transformed the body of her bashful lover into that of a monkey, whereupon she made him live in the top of the tallest tree and condemned him to remain there for a period of five hundred years, or until such time another girl should fall in love with him.

The monkey prince lived in that tree for four hundred years, in a state of constant regret, making occasional forays down into the lower reaches of the forest to abduct hapless girls, but they died of fright before he could make them see that he was not so much a monkey as a prince, and meantime the rest of the world kept turning, as the world is wont to do, generations coming and passing, coming and passing, coming and passing, so that eventually everyone had forgotten the ancient city, the king, the prince and all memory perished of what had been.

One day, though, the monkey prince approached a girl who had been disappointed in love. She was weeping at the edge of a mossy pool, contemplating how cruel fate had been to her. The monkey prince saw this and gathered fruits from the trees and brought them to her as presents. For ten days he brought

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her fruits, and sat beside her, watching her weep, and his heart went out to her and as it did she began to take notice of the sadness in his eyes, and suddenly she understood that she loved him. In this moment of realization the spell was broken and the monkey was changed back into the young prince he had been so long ago; the ancient city also was unenchanted, and restored to its former state. The two were married and thereafter lived long, wisely, and happily.

TORTOISE

Slow and steady wins the race, the poor tortoise advises us succinctly, knowing that the little chestnut he is so fond of repeating, often to throw off a hare's concentration, is not wisdom. But even the hare, not possessed of sprinter's focus, who is left behind, meditative in the starting blocks, as the tortoise stumbles forward dusty flippers pounding the track, that heavy shell he calls his home weighing like a pile of melted brick upon his back, will always remember why he is there. To win, to come first to the tape at the finish line. And off he goes at last, shaking his furry ears in disgust, always to win, always to triumph over the poor tortoise, ever aware that while slow and steady may place, it seldom wins the race.

HARE

Haste is key to any chase, quips the hare. If the fox is on your tail, make haste. If you are running for or running by: haste. Swift as the phantom, fleet as mirth, crisp as a firecracker, quick as a quirk, make haste. Haste, thinks the hare as he tears across the field, haste, but he knows it in his legs not his heart. Home is his hole with the warren warm around, asked by his offspring of whom he's sprung a lot, what was the weather in the field like today? What was the farmer's wife wearing in the carrot patch? His heart beats faster as he knows he cannot say. It's all a blur, he can't recall, he ran a race, and won. Who was second, who was third? Who knows? In haste he wins, in haste is gone, haste flies left and right and sometimes wrong.

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CHEETAH

The king of Persia is going hunting. A thousand cheetahs accompany him. Each is hooded and chained like the falconer's pet. The herd of antelope drifts across the salmon grass, unaware of the procession which—quiet, stupendous—approaches downwind. At two hundred yards the hoods are lifted, and the silver chains unlocked. There is a snippet of afternoon moon risen over the vertebral range of mountains. This sliver is reflected in cats' eyes and in all the soft eyes of the antelope who raise their heads, alarmed by the taste of stealth the breeze has carried back to them. The fickle air folds. The parched waterhole is knocked onto its side. Paws slap, the scimitar horns snap one on the other in the confusion of exodus. Everything is a swirly scattering in the plain before the king of Persia, and after a moment everything is calm red. The cheetahs—feeling friendly and frisky—do not deny the huntsmen who stride forward to replace their hoods and fasten the chains again to their blood-bouqueted forelegs. They anticipate the king's praise even as he begins in his mind to compose the congratulatory speech he will make to them this evening, out under the stars, walking as he will through the far-flung camp of fires and feasting.

BAT

The bat had pursued a disturbance, a radar trace, an insect wave and as he did, the echo patterns turned on him from tapestry of leaf and land to angle, wall and floor—the floor on which he fell, a drab brown wingy blur. He did not want to be found hiding under your bed, but made it there on achy finger-bones, his coffee-drop eyes blinded by the light of your lamp, the very light his prey had found attractive. I am your father, and know how right it may be for you not to heed sometimes my words. Listen to me now. We have earned this moment together. Switch off the lamp. Forget the broomstick your crueller human heart would lead you to get from the pantry. You don't want to obliterate his misery, but end it. Forget also the macabre and hateful wives' tales about him. The

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pipistrel does not want to be tangled in your hair. He does not want to drink your blood. He wants to continue on his way, cutting dazzling eights through air and etching arabesques. He wants to pick mosquitoes out of the thrumming darkness, mosquitoes who do want your blood. Go to the blanket chest and get out the Hudson Bay, our family's oldest. Gather him up in that blanket, so he lies in a double darkness, warm and safe. Hold him, and know he is a living being, precise as a scientist, shy as a hermit. Take him out to the second-story porch, set him down. Calmly open the folds of the blanket and if you are still afraid, so be it, and into the house you may run. If not, though, lie down in the warm night and wait and watch him recover his sense of place, his animal dignity. Show patience, there is a reward. He is in no hurry, knowing you do not intend to destroy him. Soon he'll stir, bringing curious life to the blanket. Then he will fly, his warm mammal blood and mammal fingers rising with him. Your mammal character may fly up, too—high, erratic, sonic, loose—and when it returns to you there on the porch, you can weave it, with the merest touch in the act of folding, into the blanket. Anyone who sleeps under the blanket thereafter will have bat-blessed dreams of the sweetest kind, dreams from which they will always awaken refreshed.

SCORPION

Mendacious spire with an ambush in its system, the pine lizard's a steeple, unrepentant and without religion. A bedlamite automaton and hotspur blade, the blue-tailed skink relaxes not in shade but sun where it pumps through its stinger yellow blood. A rash stalk, a maniac, a spear depot, the scorpion speaks of sickness with his glittering behind. He will not dodge from strangers, but thrusts his lyre and delivers his bilk in the milk-white desert he makes his lair. Carnal horseshoe who brings not luck but a big surprise, he's ire and piss and does not know of second thoughts or kindness. His sting does not kill, since death would be too pleasant; the hit to him is all that matters, the hit is aphrodisia, the wanton sting is come.

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HORSE

Once there was a zebra who lost his stripes, few know just how or why. He was born like his sibs under a mango noon and opened his eyes on the herd of white and black. His mother licked him, as mothers do, and he stretched his legs, strode a mile. At once he knew what was best in life—*horso*, as the humans said, *kurso, kurs, currere*: run! Like other zebras he ranged the drought-plagued plains, trying his muscles while learning to play with the wind across his croup. At night, when the others rested, he was ready to run some more, because he loved the clop of his sprinting hooves, and cherished the feel of his tail out behind. As morning broke, after a nap under stars, no matter how he tried to hold back, he found himself ahead of the herd, lengths beyond the young and old. Ahead of zebra sisters, ahead of zebra brothers. Beyond zebra bullies, zebra braggarts, zebra saints. Slow down, he'd plead, but his legs would not heed him, as limbs don't listen and the words blew away. His family began to grumble about all this speed—how rude to forsake one's mother and father, leave them choking on dust with grit in their eyes. His companions also shunned him, labelled him a show-off. His superiors were quick to note his lack of common decency. Still he gamboled, galloped, dashed, crashed, through the brush and over hills. The breeze carved his body slender, his shanks grew strong, his nostrils flared. One day it was humid and the sun beat long and deep, and as he ran his back flushed wet, so fast he charged toward the cool horizon. When evening came to the plateau edge—and to evening he'd come as fast as evening came to him—he lay down on a ledge and saw that something great had changed. His back and withers were smooth as scotch, and his stripes had fallen off behind, he saw them on the plains below. They were great dry rivers like lightning bolts; they throbbed with the pride of marathon. Others walked, he would run. Others rested, he would quest, which is, in part, why he is called equestrian.

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Three Poems by David Bottoms

American Mystic

Out of some toasty leaf-burrow she wallows into the cold,
following what calls her across
the icy crust of creek and up the ridge to my yard,
and shows herself in moonlight near the edge
of the pines, a shabby bag of nerves.

Her pink nose reads the air. Wind blurs
the suburb with snow.

I watch from the darkened kitchen, wondering if I've
placed
the dog food too near the window,
and lose her for a moment to the neighbor's shrubs.
Then around the gatepost
a white snout follows a sniff, red eyes
inquire. She enters the yard
to chow at my bowl.

Always I let her eat
before rapping the glass to watch her bluff—a hiss
at the window, a flash of teeth.
But when I rap harder, that hysterical feint—the flip
to her back, eyes slammed shut, skinny
tongue lolling in the snow.

I fade behind the stove and wait. Wind spirits
the maples, the stars
vivify. Up she jerks, hissing at a mop,
a bag of pea gravel, a wheelbarrow
tumbled under the hedge,

backs out of the yard delivered and alert,
bare-toothed, edgy.

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Paper Route, Northwest Montana

for Rick Bass

Halfway home to the warm trailer, I stopped on a ledge
above the Clark Fork. Clear sky
brightened a loose change of stars,
and far out, the valley opened a white hand.
No hurry, the rest
of the route easy, plowed roads,
a few dozen tubes in the wilderness.

I took a long piss over the rocks, the cold steam
rising at my feet,
and below me in the splintered river,
and ice floe
drifted like a barge. Across that floe
something paced white against white.

Then the barking, and I leaned toward the ledge—
high, broken yelps dragging
their echoes up the cliff. Wind shocked
my face, my cock shrank into my hand—
who glimpses
the dead without shuddering?

Downriver the floe slid into the trees.
Wind silenced the river.

Sometimes in loneliness, I claim it
a blessing, or when conversation
turns toward beauty—that huge, white splinter
drifting across the valley,
and on the point
a stunned, white wolf.

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Sierra Bear

One morning in June above Yosemite Valley, John Muir
learned
the "right manners of the wilderness."
Walking out to sketch from the top of North Dome,
he followed his borrowed St. Bernard
to the edge of a meadow
and encountered, he says, his "first Sierra bear."

I like to picture that study in nature—artist and dog
poised in amazement at the heavy muscling,
the cinnamon elegance of pelt.
So easy to imagine the bear's huge grace—
sharp snout nuzzling air,
the small ears
twitching—you can almost understand an urge
to watch him run.
Here I smile at the eyes
of the bear as Muir, recalling
a rumor of shyness, "made a rush on him,
throwing up my arms, and shouting,"

and at Muir himself wincing as we all have
at our rude behavior. "As he held his ground
in a fighting attitude,
my mistake was monstrously plain."

Confused bear cocked back on a haunch,
artist's blundering arms frozen toward embrace—
what pardon these moments become
when the bear wades off through the lilies and grass.

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Arthur Sze

Streamers

1

As an archaeologist unearths a mask with opercular teeth
and abalone eyes, someone throws a broken fan and
extension cords
into a dumpster. A point of coincidence exists in the mind

resembling the tension between a denotation and its
stretch
of definition: aurora: a luminous phenomenon consisting
of streamers or arches of light appearing in the upper
atmosphere

of a planet's polar regions, caused by the emission of light
from atoms excited by electrons accelerated along the
planet's
magnetic field lines. The mind's magnetic field lines.

When the red shimmering in the huge dome of sky stops,
a violet flare is already arcing up and across, while a man
foraging a dumpster in Cleveland finds some celery and
charred fat.

Hunger, angst: the blue shimmer of emotion, water speeding
through a canyon; to see only to know: to wake finding
a lug nut, ticket stub, string, personal card, ink smear,
$2.76.

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2

A Kwakiutl wooden dish with a double-headed wolf
is missing from a museum collection. And as

the director checks to see if it was deaccessioned,
a man sitting on a stool under bright lights

shouts: a pachinko ball dropped vertiginously
but struck a chiming ring and richocheted to the left.

We had no sense that a peony was opening,
that a thousand white buds of a Kyoto camellia

had opened at dusk and had closed at dawn.
When the man steps out of the pachinko parlor,

he will find himself vertiginously dropping
in starless space. When he discovers

that his daughter was cooking over smoking oil,
and shrieked in a fatal asthma attack,

he will walk the bright streets in an implosion of grief,
his mind will become an imploding star,

he will know he is searching among bright gold threads
for a black pattern in the weave.

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3

Set a string loop into a figure of two diamonds,
four diamonds, one diamond:
as a woman tightens her hand into a fist
and rubs it in a circular motion over her heart,
a bewildered man considering the semantics of *set*
decides no through-line exists:

to sink the head of a nail below the surface,
to fix as a distinguishing imprint, sign, or appearance,
to incite, put on a fine edge by grinding,
to adjust, adorn, put in motion, make unyielding,
to bend slightly the tooth points of a saw
alternately in opposite directions.

As the woman using her index finger makes
spiral after spiral from her aorta up over her head,
you see the possibilities for transcendence:
you have to die and die in your mind
before you can begin to see the empty spaces
the configuration of string defines.

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4

A restorer examines the pieces of a tin chandelier,
and notices the breaks in the arms are along
old solder lines, and that cheap epoxy was used.

He will have to scrape off the epoxy, scrub some flux,
heat up the chandelier and use a proper solder.
A pair of rough-legged hawks are circling over a pasture;

one hawk cuts off the rabbit's path of retreat
while the other swoops with sharp angle and curve of wings.
Cirrus, cirrostratus, cirrocumulus, altostratus,

altocumulus, stratocumulus, nimbostratus,
cumulus, cumulonimbus, stratus: is there no end?
Memories stored in the body begin to glow.

A woman seals basil in brown bags and hangs them
from the ceiling. A dead sturgeon washes to shore.
The sun is at the horizon, but you see another

sun rippling in water. It's not that the angle
of reflection equals the angle of incidence,
but there's exultation, pleasure, distress, death, love.

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5

The world resembles a cuttlefish changing colors
and shimmering. An apprentice archer has

stretched the bowstring properly, but does not know
he will miss the target because he is not aiming in the hips.

He will learn to hit the target without aiming
when he has died in his mind. I am not scared of death,

though I am appalled at how obsession with security
yields a pin-pushing, pencil-shaving existence.

You can descend to the swimming level of sharks,
be a giant kelp growing from the ocean bottom up

to the surface light, but the critical moment
is to die feeling the infinite stillness of the passions,

to revel in the touch of hips, hair, lips, hands,
feel the collapse of space in December light.

When I know I am no longer trying to know the spectral lines
of the earth, I can point to a cuttlefish and say,

"Here it is sepia," already it is deep-brown,
and exult, "Here it is deep-brown," already it is white.

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6

Red koi swim toward us, and black
carp are rising out of the depths of the pond,
but our sustenance is a laugh, a grief,

a walk at night in the snow,
seeing the pure gold of a flickering candle—
a moment at dusk when we see

that deer have been staring at us,
we did not see them edge out of the brush,
a moment when someone turns on a light

and turns a window into a mirror,
a moment when a child asks,
"When will it be tomorrow?"

To say "A bell cannot be red and violet
at the same place and time because
of the logical structure of color" is true

but is a dot that must enlarge into
a zero: a void, *enso*, red shimmer,
breath, endless beginning, pure body, pure mind.

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Geoffrey O'Brien

Haruspex

That summer the sand rusted,
The twigs cracked more easily. A worker was sent for
To carry away broken pipes and in their place put
A radiant partition with holes cut in it
For flavoring the air. They were storing piles of pictures
In shoeboxes: a girl with a ghostly talking cat,
Dancers groaning and covered with sticky cloth.
The rooms overflowed. There was a book called *The Dark Ages,*
Another called *The Puzzle Lock*. The waiting period
Was occupied by objects of color and value:
A rare smoke whose odor affirmed bone harmony,
A lacquered sheath, a necktie decorated with yellow monkeys.
All this will have been cleared, whole banks of memory
Cleaned for new use. Between the multiple glass surfaces
Crowbars made roads. Damaged particles of restaurant illustration
Fell toward the hall too soon to be catalogued.
The coverings of the houses were erased by signatures.
There were new ways of making breakfast happen
So that it wouldn't seem to exist. The car swallowed its door,
The children were tall enough to seal all the windows.
They smashed the orange hats.
But the paper with the face on it broke apart into dots
And the era for war service had already begun: exercise programs,
Bulb committees, continuing adventures of a featureless harbormaster.

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On the painting hidden inside the lunchbox
A tree poured arrows from its hands.
The curtain between whose folds she whispered
Swayed with abandon toward the unlistening dark.
Young men threw eggs against brick. They had a name
For the loose blue building sliding into its rot,
They called it a church. On the street there were shoes and fish.
Within the street there were compacted grains
Forced through the tunnels of a metal body
To lose their shape under the pressure of rolling weights.
Near four a sliver of sun hit the cotton
At the shop front and made a lake of light
Around whose edges they told stories about robbers
Grown fat with leases, their cars filled with silk.
Said the world leafs and flips down dry
And they toss the used springs out. Served sandwiches
On the ruined avenue among murals of rifles and wildflowers.
A child made a city from disappearing elves,
Aftershock of visible noise. In the renovated warehouse
Pattern engineers divided the wall into smaller walls
So each in turn would be bright pink as the sun moved across.
The light could be focused on the palm of a hand
Until it burned. Eventually the leaves filled with dust.
Pumps fell into disuse. Near the newly emptied suburb
Stacked planks guarded against windbursts.
The car people captured vistas of themselves in mid-desert
And played them back on plaster screens, laughing
At how light tricks made the faces bend or go green.
In the bed yard the street nurses mixed pipe medicine.
The news was that a building swelled and fell open,
A river silted up with music boxes,
The next town burned a thief. The new songs became longer

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Until it was harder to recall the old ones. It took so much
time
To tell what happened on the block last week. The river
chief
Got his holders back after one of his messengers
Ended up at a jammed plaza. When Circular Resentment
Played at the opening of the track exchange
Bite Squad ambushed them. A cousin lost his wrist
In the confusion after the wedding. A place was found
Where the bottoms of houses made the skin burn.
There were many songs about looking for exit routes
And about spots where paths broke into duplicates,
The "mimic roads" that led only to death. Knowledge
Of what can be hidden or eaten was said to reside
Among certain unseen commuters. They braided old wires
And felt the pulsing of directional signals: upon pressing
down
Voices tingled in the thumbs. Everyone was busy making
money
Out of foam sheets and scraped frames. Living from door
to door
The family kids named it the Mouse Hole. The stories all
started
The same way: "In the morning somebody wandered
From where he was sleeping and came to a turn in the
road
And he didn't recognize where he was or had walked
from."
Most never came back, a few went back and forth.
The sign went dead. It used to announce the alley
Where they sold juice. She took its letters in her hands
And pointed them north, south, east, west.
Afterwards she felt as if she had swallowed the letters
And that they made a new sentence which was inside her
And which was her. But when they asked her she said
"I can't read it, nobody will ever read it,
It's only trying to tell me it doesn't rust."

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Alberto Ríos

Mr. Luna and History

There are many facts in the world.
Most are passengers, but some
Drive the car.
The boy king Tutankhamen caused to be made
For himself the first bed.
In 1340, Thomas Blanket was said to have had
A refinement.
And in 1932, as schoolchildren know,
Teodoro Luna, president of all that had come before,
Invented the making of love.

So went the old joke,
Which was funny but not untrue.
There was talk after his death of a statue,
But the thought of it was enough,
Pigeons landing not on his head or arms,
But rather on his fame,
Two dozen of them.

Some mouths have the custom of food,
Some of words. Most go with food.
Mr. Luna's mouth had the habit of women.

In his later years his wife thought him
Speaking in his sleep,
But that was not it,
His mouth moving sometimes like a yawn,
Sometimes like a fish.

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It is said
A perfect diamond is invisible in water.
How Mr. Luna died is not known,
Nor what happened to his body.
It is said he gave some of himself each time,
From the inside and the out,
Awake but also in dream.
It is said he became a thousand women.

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Hilda Morley

The Barter

That love of hospitality
& the old Irish
passion for food and drink (good food,
good drinking, wine undiluted,
in
drinking-horns)
& the affectionate serving of them,
the highly colored clothes,
bright flashing of
swords & jewels, the lavish feasting
of the Irish sagas became
in you a marvellous hand at cooking, an accurate wrist for
sauces, meticulous fingers for degrees of
spices, an eye for textures, balances, matching of
surfaces and shapes—whether in food or clothing, furniture
or walls: stone, wood or wool, patterns
or threads, knots, planks or ropes,
& in
the clothes you wore: the blue-green shirts,
the odorous
leather gloves, the shoes
& in the colors of your house:
pale-yellows, grays,
the good dark oak of the table made to
your design, well-polished after sanding, waxed & rubbed
with natural stains
the colors I still think of
after many years as colors of home.

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Out of
that world you came, after two thousand years
of feasting, oaths, high festivals, great merriment
& vows never to be broken,
& the colors of your eyes, skin,
hair taken from the early Irish heroes, their cheeks the
color of berries or
the color of snow—hair red-gold,
eyes blue as the sea you loved to
sail with knowing hands, holding
the tiller, lashing sheets, hands
both delicate & strong,
stronger perhaps than
your white-rosy body,
your shoulders
flecked with orange-gold,
the beauty
of your lower body,
blossoming
of golden pubic hair,
the rosy whiteness
of your cock
a physiognomy
of the early Irish heroes of
the sagas
& the brilliance
of enjoyment in whatever
warms the air, whatever can
delight the company of
friends with repartee, laughter
& with joking.
Strange drawn-out hours we lived together
when words became language out of a dream
& what was real
was fantasy!
those words might have been spoken by champions
of the sagas,

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heroes of
tremendous feats of arms
half-human,
half-divine, whose lives might
shake the heavens in their need for fulfillment,
or
for punishment.
"You will be remembered"
you said, "as one of those Irish queens who broke her vow
and never will be forgotten."
That world boiled up behind you,
the world of demi-gods, the Tuatha de Danaan:
the bartering
of a life for utter bliss,
of truth
equal to bliss, of bliss in lying equal
to destruction.

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Before a long journey begins which includes crossing

boundaries and time zones the prudent traveler checks her maps

travel documents, passport, Visa, medical innoculations,

clothes to fit the weather, and apt currencies for the

destination. If the journey include crossing regional

national boundaries and time zones, the traveller

checks the validity of her

The less careful traveler is not so superb in her

planning, once the journey commences she unfailingly

reaches destination, although possibly not the

The desperate traveler affords the greatest surprises and

the most exquisite thrills, her sole preparation for

the road is the fierce determination to leave where she is,

and her only certain destination is somewhere other than

where she has been.

"I got the key to the Highway,

Booked down and I'm bound to go

A manuscript page from a tribute to Oprah Winfrey by Maya Angelou

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The Art of Fiction CXIX

Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou described herself in 1972 as "a born loser—had to be: from a broken family, raped at eight, unwed mother at sixteen." Yet in her sixty-two years Angelou has achieved prominence as an author, poet, conductor, actor, singer, songwriter, playwright and film director. She is perhaps best known for the autobiographical series which she began in 1970 with I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. *The book was an immediate critical and popular success and was nominated for the National Book Award. James Baldwin hailed it as part of "the beginning of a new era in the minds and hearts of all*

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black men and women, liberating the reader into life simply because Maya Angelou confronts her own life with such moving wonder, such a luminous dignity." In this first autobiography, Angelou depicts her experience of growing up in the segregated Southern town of Stamps, Arkansas. Angelou was born April 4, 1928 in St. Louis, Missouri, but her divorced parents, Bailey Johnson, a doorman and later a naval clinician, and Vivian Baxter Johnson, sent her to live with her grandmother in Stamps. There, she attended and graduated from Lafayette County Training School. At thirteen, she went to San Francisco to live with her mother. She graduated from Mission High School at sixteen, and gave birth to her son, Guy Johnson two months later.

In Gather Together in My Name *(1974) Angelou recounts the next four years of her life as a single mother with a young child. She worked as a Creole cook, a waitress, and an inexperienced madam for two lesbian prostitutes.* Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas *(1976), chronicles Angelou's life into the 1950s.* The Heart of a Woman *(1981), and* All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes *(1986), tell of Angelou's journey to Africa and her return to the United States, as well as her involvement in the civil rights movement.*

Angelou's first volume of poetry, Just Give Me a Cold Drink of Water 'for I Die *(1971), was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Her other collections include* Oh Pray My Wings Are Gonna Fit Me Well *(1975), and* And Still I Rise *(1978), poetry which often hinges on the complexities of race relations from an involved personal viewpoint. In 1960 and 1961 she worked for Martin Luther King, Jr., as a coordinator for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.*

Throughout her life, Angelou has been involved in the performing arts. She has studied theater with Frank Silvera and Gene Frankel and her roles in Look Away *(1973), and as Nyo Boto, the grandmother in* Roots *(1977), earned Angelou Tony nominations. She has studied dance with Martha Graham, Pearl Primus and Ann Halprin; as the première danseuse in a State Department-sponsored production of* Porgy and Bess,

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*Angelou toured twenty-two countries in Europe and Africa. She has also composed music, some of which has been recorded by B.B. King. Working in film and television, Angelou was the first black woman to have an original screenplay produced (*Georgia, Georgia, *1971), and was also the first black American woman film director.*

Angelou lived for five years in Africa, becoming associate editor of the Arab Observer, *and editor of* African Review, *and an administrator at the University of Ghana. She has held positions at several universities in the United States, including California State University and Wichita State University. She was a Yale University Chubb Fellow in 1970, was a Rockefeller Scholar in Italy (1975) and has received honorary degrees from Smith College (1975), Mills College (1975), and Lawrence University (1976). She currently resides in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where she is Reynolds Professor of American Studies at Wake Forest University.*

This interview was conducted on the stage of the YMHA on Manhattan's upper East Side. A large audience, predominantly women, was on hand, filling indeed every seat, with standees in the back . . . a testament to Maya Angelou's drawing-power. Close to the stage was a small contingent of black women dressed in the white robes of the Black Muslim order. Her presence dominated the proceedings. Many of her remarks drew fervid applause, especially those which reflected her views on racial problems, the need to persevere, and "courage." She is an extraordinary performer and has a powerful stage presence. Many of the answers seemed as much directed to the audience as to the interviewer so that when Maya Angelou concluded the evening by reading aloud from her work—again to a rapt audience—it seemed a logical extension of a planned entertainment.

INTERVIEWER

You once told me that you write lying on a made-up bed with a bottle of sherry, a dictionary, *Roget's Thesaurus*, yellow pads, an ashtray and a Bible. What's the function of the Bible?

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MAYA ANGELOU

The language of all the interpretations, the translations, of the Judaic Bible and the Christian Bible, is musical, just wonderful. I read the Bible to myself; I'll take any translation, any edition, and read it aloud, just to hear the language, hear the rhythm, and remind myself how beautiful English is. Though I do manage to mumble around in about seven or eight languages, English remains the most beautiful of languages. It will do anything.

INTERVIEWER

Do you read it to get inspired to pick up your own pen?

ANGELOU

For melody. For content also. I'm working at trying to be a Christian, and that's serious business. It's like trying to be a good Jew, a good Muslim, a good Buddhist, a good Shintoist, a good Zoroastrian, a good friend, a good lover, a good mother, a good buddy: it's serious business. It's not something where you think, "Oh, I've got it done. I did it all day, hot-diggety." The truth is, all day long you try to do it, try to be it, and then in the evening, if you're honest and have a little courage, you look at yourself and say, "Hmm. I only blew it eighty-six times. Not bad." I'm trying to be a Christian, and the Bible helps me to remind myself what I'm about.

INTERVIEWER

Do you transfer that melody to your own prose? Do you think your prose has that particular ring that one associates with the King James version?

ANGELOU

I want to hear how English sounds; how Edna St. Vincent Millay heard English. I want to hear it, so I read it aloud. It is not so that I can then imitate it. It is to remind me what a glorious language it is. Then, I try to be particular, and even original. It's a little like reading Gerald Manley Hopkins or Paul Laurence Dunbar, or James Weldon Johnson.

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INTERVIEWER

And is the bottle of sherry for the end of the day, or to fuel the imagination?

ANGELOU

I might have it at 6:15 A.M. just as soon as I get in, but usually it's about eleven o'clock when I'll have a glass of sherry.

INTERVIEWER

When you are refreshed by the Bible and the sherry, how do you start a day's work?

ANGELOU

I have kept a hotel room in every town I've ever lived in. I rent a hotel room for a few months, leave my home at six and try to be at work by 6:30. To write, I lie across the bed, so that this elbow is absolutely encrusted at the end, just so rough with callouses. I never allow the hotel people to change the bed, because I never sleep there. I stay until 12:30 or 1:30 in the afternoon, and then I go home and try to breathe; I look at the work around five; I have an orderly dinner: proper, quiet, lovely dinner; and then I go back to work the next morning. Sometimes in hotels I'll go into the room, and there'll be a note on the floor which says, "Dear Miss Angelou, let us change the sheets. We think they are moldy." But I only allow them to come in and empty wastebaskets. I insist that all things are taken off the walls. I don't want anything in there. I go into the room, and I feel as if all my beliefs are suspended. Nothing holds me to anything. No milkmaids, no flowers, nothing. I just want to *feel* and then when I start to work I'll remember. I'll read something, maybe the Psalms, maybe, again, something from Mr. Dunbar, James Weldon Johnson. And I'll remember how beautiful, how pliable the language is, how it will lend itself. If you pull it, it says, "Okay." I remember that, and I start to write. Nathaniel Hawthorne says, "Easy reading is damn hard writing." I try to pull the language in to such a sharpness that it jumps off the page. It must look easy, but it takes me forever to get it to look so easy. Of

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course, there are those critics—New York critics as a rule—who say, "Well, Maya Angelou has a new book out and, of course, it's good but then she's a natural writer." Those are the ones I want to grab by the throat and wrestle to the floor because it takes me forever to get it to sing. I *work* at the language. On an evening like this, looking out at the auditorium, if I had to write this evening from my point of view, I'd see the rust-red used worn velvet seats, and the lightness where people's backs have rubbed against the back of the seat so that it's a light orange; then, the beautiful colors of the people's faces, the white, pink-white, beige-white, light beige and brown and tan—I would have to look at all that, at all those faces and the way they sit on top of their necks. When I would end up writing after four hours or five hours in my room, it might sound like: "It was a rat that sat on a mat. That's that. Not a cat." But I would continue to play with it and pull at it and say, "I love you. Come to me. I love you." It might take me two or three weeks just to describe what I'm seeing now.

INTERVIEWER

How do you know when it's what you want?

ANGELOU

I know when it's the best I can do. It may not be the best there is. Another writer may do it much better. But I know when it's the best I can do. I know that one of the great arts that the writer develops is the art of saying, "No. No, I'm finished. Bye." And leaving it alone. I will not write it into the ground. I will not write the life out of it. I won't do that.

INTERVIEWER

How much revising is involved?

ANGELOU

I write in the morning, and then go home about midday and take a shower, because writing, as you know, is very hard work, so you have to do a double ablution. Then I go out and shop—I'm a serious cook—and pretend to be normal. I play

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sane: "Good morning! Fine, thank you. And you?" And I go home. I prepare dinner for myself and if I have houseguests, I do the candles and the pretty music and all that. Then, after all the dishes are moved away, I read what I wrote that morning. And more often than not, if I've done nine pages I may be able to save two and half, or three. That's the cruelest time you know, to really admit that it doesn't work. And to blue pencil it. When I finish maybe fifty pages, and read them—fifty acceptable pages—it's not too bad. I've had the same editor since 1967. Many times he has said to me over the years, or asked me, "Why would you use a semi-colon instead of a colon?" And many times over the years I have said to him things like: "I will never speak to you again. Forever. Goodbye. That is it. Thank you very much." And I leave. Then I read the piece and I think of his suggestions. I send him a telegram that says, "OK, so you're right. So what? Don't ever mention this to me again. If you do, I will never speak to you again." About two years ago I was visiting him and his wife in the Hamptons. I was at the end of a dining room table with a sit-down dinner of about fourteen people. Way at the end I said to someone, "I sent him telegrams over the years." From the other end of the table he said, "And I've kept every one!" Brute! But the editing, one's own editing, before the editor sees it, is the most important.

INTERVIEWER

The five autobiographical books follow each other in chronological order. When you started writing *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* did you know that you would move on from that? It almost works line by line into the second volume.

ANGELOU

I know, but I didn't really mean to. I thought I was going to write *Caged Bird* and that would be it and I would go back to playwriting and writing scripts for television. Autobiography is awfully seductive; it's wonderful. Once I got into it I realized I was following a tradition established by Frederick Douglas—the slave narrative—speaking in the first-person

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singular talking about the first-person plural, always saying "I" meaning "we." And what a responsibility. Trying to work with that form, the autobiographical mode, to change it, to make it bigger, richer, finer, and more inclusive in the twentieth century has been a great challenge for me. I've written five now, and I really hope—the works are required reading in many universities and colleges in the United States—that people *read* my work. The greatest compliment I receive is when people walk up to me on the street or in airports and say, "Miss Angelou, I *wrote* your book last year and I really—I mean I *read* . . ." That is it: that the person has come into the books so seriously, so completely, that he or she, black or white, male or female, feels, "That's my story. I told it. I'm making it up on the spot." That's the great compliment. I didn't expect, originally, that I was going to continue with the form. I thought I was going to write a little book and it would be fine, and I would go on back to poetry, write a little music.

INTERVIEWER

What about the genesis of the first book? Who were the people who helped you shape those sentences that leap off the page?

ANGELOU

Oh well, they started years and years before I ever wrote, when I was very young. I loved the black American minister. I loved the melody of the voice, and the imagery, so rich, and almost impossible. The minister in my church in Arkansas, when I was very young, would use phrases such as "God stepped out, the sun over his right shoulder, the moon nestling in the palm of his hand." I mean, I just loved it, and I loved the black poets, and I loved Shakespeare, and Edgar Allan Poe, and I liked Matthew Arnold a lot, still do. Being mute for a number of years, I read, and memorized, and all those people have had tremendous influence . . . in the first book, and even in the most recent book.

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INTERVIEWER

Mute?

ANGELOU

I was raped when I was very young. I told my brother the name of the person who had done it. Within a few days the man was killed. In my child's mind—seven and a half years old—I thought my voice had killed him. So I stopped talking for five years. Of course I've written about this in *Caged Bird*.

INTERVIEWER

When did you decide you were going to be a writer? Was there a moment when you suddenly said "This is what I wish to do for the rest of my life."?

ANGELOU

Well, I had written a television series for PBS, and I was going out to California. I thought I was a poet and playwright. That was what I was going to do the rest of my life. Or become famous as a real estate broker. This sounds like name-dropping, and it really is—but James Baldwin took me over to dinner with Jules and Judy Feiffer one evening. All three of them are great talkers. They went on with their stories and I had to fight for the right to play it good. I had to insert myself to tell some stories too. Well, the next day, Judy Feiffer called Bob Loomis, an editor at Random House, and suggested that if he could get me to write an autobiography, he'd have something. So he phoned me and I said, "No, under no circumstances; I certainly will not do such a thing." So I went out to California to produce this series on African and black American culture. Loomis called me out there about three times. Each time I said no. Then he talked to James Baldwin. Jimmy gave him a ploy which always works with me—though I'm not proud to say that. The next time he called, he said, "Well, Miss Angelou. I won't bother you again. It's just as well that you don't attempt to write this book, because

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to write autobiography as literature is almost impossible." I said, "What are you talking about? I'll do it." I'm not proud about this button which can be pushed and I will immediately jump.

INTERVIEWER

Do you select a dominant theme for each book?

ANGELOU

I try to remember times in my life, incidents in which there was the dominating theme of cruelty, or kindness, or generosity, or envy, or happiness, glee . . . perhaps four incidents in the period I'm going to write about. Then I select, the one which lends itself best to my device and which I can write as drama without falling into melodrama.

INTERVIEWER

Did you write for a particular audience?

ANGELOU

I thought early on if I could write a book for black girls it would be good, because there were so few books for a black girl to read that said "This is how it is to grow up." Then, I thought "I'd better, you know, enlarge that group, the market group that I'm trying to reach." I decided to write for black boys, and then white girls, and then white boys.

But what I try to keep in mind mostly is my craft. That's what I really try for; I try to allow myself to be impelled by my art—if that doesn't sound too pompous and weird—accept the impulse, and then try my best to have a command of the craft. If I'm feeling depressed, and losing my control, then I think about the reader. But that is very rare—to think about the reader when the work is going on.

INTERVIEWER

So you don't keep a particular reader in mind when you sit down in that hotel room and begin to compose or write. It's yourself.

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ANGELOU

It's myself . . . and my reader. I would be a liar, a hypocrite, or a fool—and I'm not any of those—to say that I don't write for the reader. I do. But for the reader who hears, who really will work at it, going behind what I seem to say. So I write for myself and that reader who will pay the dues. There's a phrase in West Africa, in Ghana; it's called "deep talk." For instance, there's a saying: "The trouble for the thief is not how to steal the chief's bugle, but where to blow it." Now, on the face of it, one understands that. But when you really think about it, it takes you deeper. In West Africa they call that "deep talk." I'd like to think I write "deep talk." When you read me, you should be able to say "Gosh, that's pretty. That's lovely. That's nice. Maybe there's something else? Better read it again." Years ago I read a man named Machado de Assis who wrote a book called *Dom Casmro: Epitaph of a Small Winner.* Machado de Assis is a South American writer—black mother, Portuguese father—writing in 1865, say. I thought the book was very nice. Then I went back and read the book and said, "Hmm. I didn't realize all that was in that book." Then I read it again, and again, and I came to the conclusion that what Machado de Assis had done for me was almost a trick: he had beckoned me onto the beach to watch a sunset. And I had watched the sunset with pleasure. When I turned around to come back in I found that the tide had come in over my head. That's when I decided to write. I would write so that the reader says, "That's so nice. Oh boy, that's pretty. Let me read that again." I think that's why *Caged Bird* is in its twenty-first printing in hardcover and its twenty-ninth in paper. All my books are still in print, in hardback as well as paper, because people go back and say, "Let me read that. Did she *really* say that?"

INTERVIEWER

The books are episodic, aren't they? Almost as if you had put together a string of short stories. I wondered if, as an autobiographer, you ever fiddled with the truth to make the story better.

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ANGELOU

Well, sometimes. I love the phrase "fiddle with." It's so English. Sometimes I make a character from a composite of three or four people, because the essence in any one person is not sufficiently strong to be written about. Essentially though, the work is true though sometimes I fiddle with the facts. Many of the people I've written about are alive today, and I have them to face. I wrote about an ex-husband—he's an African—in *The Heart of a Woman*. Before I did, I called him in Dar-es-Salaam and said, "I'm going to write about some of our years together." He said, "Now before you ask, I want you to know that I shall sign my release, because I know you will not lie. However, I am sure I shall argue with you about your interpretation of the truth."

INTERVIEWER

Did he enjoy his portrait finally, or did you argue about it?

ANGELOU

Well, he didn't argue, but I was kind, too.

INTERVIEWER

I would guess this would make it very easy for you to move from autobiography into novel, where you can do anything you want with your characters.

ANGELOU

Yes, but for me, fiction is not the sweetest form. I really am trying to do something with autobiography now. It has caught me. I'm using the first-person singular, and trying to make that the first-person plural, so that anybody can read the work and say, "Hmm, that's the truth, yes, *uh-huh*," and live in the work. It's a large ambitious dream. But I love the form.

INTERVIEWER

Aren't the extraordinary events of your life very hard for the rest of us to identify with?

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ANGELOU

Oh my God, I've lived a very simple life! You can say, "Oh yes, at thirteen this happened to me, and at fourteen . . ." But those are facts. But the facts can obscure the truth, what it really felt like. Every human being has paid the earth to grow up. Most people don't grow up. It's too damn difficult. What happens is most people get older. That's the truth of it. They honor their credit cards, they find parking spaces, they marry, they have the nerve to have children, but they don't grow up. Not really. They get older. But to grow up costs the earth, the *earth*. It means you take responsibility for the time you take up, for the space you occupy. It's serious business. And you find out what it costs us to love and to lose, to dare and to fail. And maybe even more, to succeed. What it costs, in truth. Not superficial costs—anybody can have that—I mean in truth. That's what I write. What it really is like. I'm just telling a very simple story.

INTERVIEWER

Aren't you tempted to lie? Novelists lie, don't they?

ANGELOU

I don't know about lying for novelists. I look at some of the great novelists, and I think the reason they are great is that they're telling the truth. The fact is they're using made-up names, made-up people, made-up places and made-up times, but they're telling the truth about the human being—what we are capable of, what makes us lose, laugh, weep, fall down and gnash our teeth and wring our hands and kill each other and love each other.

INTERVIEWER

James Baldwin, along with a lot of writers in this series, said that "when you're writing you're trying to find out something you didn't know." When you write do you search for something that you didn't know about yourself or about us?

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ANGELOU

Yes. When I'm writing, I am trying to find out who I am, who we are, what we're capable of, how we feel, how we lose and stand up, and go on from darkness into darkness. I'm trying for that. But I'm also trying for the language. I'm trying to see how it can really sound. I really love language. I love it for what it does for us, how it allows us to explain the pain and the glory, the nuances and the delicacies of our existence. And then it allows us to laugh, allows us to show wit. Real wit is shown in language. We need language.

INTERVIEWER

Baldwin also said that his family urged him not to become a writer. His father felt that there was a white monopoly in publishing. Did you ever have any of those feelings: that you were going up against something that was really immensely difficult for a black writer?

ANGELOU

Yes, but I didn't find it so just in writing. I've found it so in all the things I've attempted. In the shape of American society, the white male is on top, then the white female, and then the black male, and at the bottom is the black woman. So that's been always so. That is nothing new. It doesn't mean that it doesn't shock me, shake me up. . . .

INTERVIEWER

I can understand that in various social stratifications, but why in art?

ANGELOU

Well, unfortunately, racism is pervasive. It doesn't stop at the university gate, or at the ballet stage. I knew great black dancers, male and female, who were told early on that they were not shaped, physically, for ballet. Today, we see very few black ballet dancers. Unfortunately, in the theater and in film, racism and sexism stand at the door. I'm the first black female director in Hollywood; in order to direct, I went to Sweden and

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took a course in cinematography so I would understand what the camera would do. Though I had written a screenplay, and even composed the score, I wasn't allowed to direct it. They brought in a young Swedish director who hadn't even shaken a black person's hand before. The film was *Georgia, Georgia* with Diane Sands. People either loathed it or complimented me. Both were wrong, because it was not what I wanted, not what I would have done if I had been allowed to direct it. So I thought, well, what I guess I'd better do is be ten times as prepared. That is not new. I wish it was. In every case I know I have to be ten times more prepared than my white counterpart.

INTERVIEWER

Even as a writer where . . .

ANGELOU

Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER

Yet a manuscript is what arrives at the editor's desk, not a person, not a body.

ANGELOU

Yes. I must have such control of my tools, of words, that I can make this sentence leap off the page. I have to have my writing so polished that it doesn't look polished at all. I want a reader, especially an editor, to be a half-hour into my book before he realizes it's reading he's doing.

INTERVIEWER

But isn't that the goal of every person who sits down at a typewriter?

ANGELOU

Absolutely. Yes. It's possible to be overly sensitive, to carry a bit of paranoia along with you. But I don't think that's a bad thing. It keeps you sharp, keeps you on your toes.

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INTERVIEWER

Is there a thread one can see through the five autobiographies? It seems to me that one prevailing theme is the love of your child.

ANGELOU

Yes, well, that's true. I think that that's a particular. I suppose, if I'm lucky, the particular is seen in the general. There is, I hope, a thesis in my work: we may encounter many defeats, but we must not be defeated. That sounds goody two-shoes, I know, but I believe that a diamond is the result of extreme pressure and time. Less time is crystal. Less than that is coal. Less than that is fossilized leaves. Less than that it's just plain dirt. In all my work, in the movies I write, the lyrics, the poetry, the prose, the essays, I am saying that we may encounter many defeats—maybe it's imperative that we encounter the defeats—but we are much stronger than we appear to be, and maybe much better than we allow ourselves to be. Human beings are more alike than unalike. There's no real mystique. Every human being, every Jew, Christian, back-slider, Muslim, Shintoist, Zen Buddhist, atheist, agnostic, every human being wants a nice place to live, a good place for the children to go to school, healthy children, somebody to love, the courage, the unmitigated gall to accept love in return, someplace to party on Saturday or Sunday night, and someplace to perpetuate that God. There's no mystique. None. And if I'm right in my work, that's what my work says.

INTERVIEWER

Have you been back to Stamps, Arkansas?

ANGELOU

About 1970, Bill Moyers, Willie Morris and I were at some affair. Judith Moyers as well—I think she was the instigator. We may have had two or three scotches, or seven or eight. Willie Morris was then with *Harper's* magazine. The suggestion came up: "Why don't we all go back South." Willie Morris was from Yazoo, Mississippi. Bill Moyers is from Marshall, Texas,

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which is just a hop, skip, and a jump—about as far as you can throw a chitterling—from Stamps, my hometown. Sometime in the middle of the night there was this idea: "Why don't Bill Moyers and Maya Angelou go to Yazoo, Mississippi, to visit Willie Morris? Then why don't Willie Morris and Maya Angelou go to Marshall, Texas, to visit Bill Moyers?" I said, "Great." I was agreeing with both. Then they said Willie Morris and Bill Moyers would go to Stamps, Arkansas to visit Maya Angelou, and I said, "No way, José. I'm not going back to that little town with two white men! I will not do it!" Well, after a while Bill Moyers called me—he was doing a series on "creativity"—and he said, "Maya, come on, let's go to Stamps." I said, "No way." He continued, "I want to talk about creativity." I said, "You know, I don't want to know where it resides." I really don't, and I still don't. One of the problems in the West is that people are too busy putting things under microscopes and so forth. Creativity is greater than the sum of its parts. All I want to know is that creativity is there. I want to know that I can put my hand behind my back like Tom Thumb and pull out a plum. Anyway, Moyers went on and on and so did Judith and before I knew it, I found myself in Stamps, Arkansas. Stamps, Arkansas! With Bill Moyers, in front of my grandmother's door. My God! We drove out of town: me with Bill and Judith. Back of us was the crew, a New York crew, you know, very "Right, dig where I'm comin' from, like, get it on," and so forth. We got about three miles outside of Stamps and I said, "Stop the car. Let the car behind us pull up. Get those people in with you and I'll take their car." I suddenly was taken back to being twelve years old in a southern, tiny town where my grandmother told me, "Sistah, never be on a country road with any white boys." I was two hundred years older than black pepper, but I said, "Stop the car." I did. I got out of the car. And I knew these guys—certainly Bill. Bill Moyers is a friend and brother-friend to me; we care for each other. But dragons, fears, the grotesques of childhood always must be confronted at childhood's door. Any other place is esoteric and has nothing to do with the great fear that is laid upon one as a child. So anyway, we did Bill Moyers's show. And

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it seems to be a very popular program, and it's the first of the "creativity" programs. . . .

INTERVIEWER

Did going back assuage those childhood fears?

ANGELOU

They are there like griffins hanging off the sides of old and tired European buildings.

INTERVIEWER

It hadn't changed?

ANGELOU

No, worse if anything.

INTERVIEWER

But it was forty years before you went back to the South, to North Carolina. Was that because of a fear of finding griffins everywhere, Stamps being a typical community of the South?

ANGELOU

Well, I've never felt the need to prove anything to an audience. I'm always concerned about who I am to me first, to myself and God. I really am. I didn't go south because I didn't want to pull up whatever clout I had, because that's boring, that's not real, not true; that doesn't tell me anything. If I had known I was afraid, I would have gone earlier. I just thought I'd find the South really unpleasant. I have moved south now. I *live* there.

INTERVIEWER

Perhaps writing the autobiographies, finding out about yourself, would have made it much easier to go back.

ANGELOU

I know many think that writing sort of "clears the air." It

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doesn't do that at all. If you are going to write autobiography, don't expect that it will clear anything up. It makes it more clear to you, but it doesn't alleviate anything. You simply know it better, you have names for people.

INTERVIEWER

There's a part in *Caged Bird* where you and your brother want to do a scene from *The Merchant of Venice*, and you don't dare do it because your grandmother would find out that Shakespeare was not only deceased but white.

ANGELOU

I don't think she'd have minded if she'd known he was deceased. I tried to pacify her—My mother knew Shakespeare, but my grandmother was raising us. When I told her I wanted to recite —it was actually Portia's speech—Mama said to me, "Now sistah, what are you goin' to render?" The phrase was so fetching. The phrase was: "Now, little mistress Marguerite will render her rendition." Mama said, "Now, sistah, what are you goin' to render?" I said, "Mama, I'm going to render a piece written by William Shakespeare." My grandmother asked me, "Now, sistah, who is this very William Shakespeare?" I had to tell her that he was white, it was going to come out. Somebody would let it out. So I told Mama, "Mama, he's white, but he's dead." Then I said, "He's been dead for centuries," thinking she'd forgive him because of this little idiosyncracy. She said, "No Ma'am, little mistress you will not. No Ma'am, little mistress you will not." So I rendered James Weldon Johnson, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes.

INTERVIEWER

Were books allowed in the house?

ANGELOU

None of those books were in the house; they were in the school. I'd bring them home from school, and my brother gave me Edgar Allan Poe because he knew I loved him. I loved him

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so much I called him "EAP." But as I said, I had a problem when I was young: from the time I was seven and a half to the time I was twelve and a half I was a mute. I could speak, but I didn't speak for five years, and I was what was called a "volunteer mute." But I read and I memorized just masses—I don't know if one is born with photographic memory, but I think you can develop it. I just have that.

INTERVIEWER

What is the significance of the title, *All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes?*

ANGELOU

I never agreed, even as a young person, with the Thomas Wolfe title *You Can't Go Home Again.* Instinctively I didn't. But the truth is, you can never *leave* home. You take it with you; it's under your fingernails; it's in the hair follicles; it's in the way you smile; it's in the ride of your hips, in the passage of your breasts; it's all there, no matter where you go. You can take on the affectations and the postures of other places, and even learn to speak their ways. But the truth is, home is between your teeth. Everybody's always looking for it: Jews go to Israel; black-Americans and Africans in the Diaspora go to Africa; Europeans, Anglo-Saxons go to England and Ireland; people of Germanic background go to Germany. It's a very queer quest. We can kid ourselves; we can tell ourselves, "Oh yes, honey, I live in Tel Aviv, actually. . . ." The truth is a stubborn fact. So this book is about trying to go home.

INTERVIEWER

If you had to endow a writer with the most necessary pieces of equipment, other than, of course, yellow legal pads, what would these be?

ANGELOU

Ears. Ears. To hear the language. But there's no one piece of equipment that is most necessary. Courage, first.

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INTERVIEWER

Did you ever feel that you could not get your work published? Would you have continued to write if Random House had returned your manuscript?

ANGELOU

I didn't think it was going to be very easy, but I knew I was going to do something. The real reason black people exist at all today is because there's a resistance to a larger society that says, "You can't do it. You can't survive. And if you survive, you certainly can't thrive. And if you thrive, you can't thrive with any passion or compassion or humor or style." There's a saying, a song which says, "Don't you let nobody turn you 'round, turn you 'round, turn you 'round. Don't you let nobody turn you 'round." Well, I've always believed that. So knowing that, knowing that nobody could turn me 'round, if I didn't publish, well, I would design this theater we're sitting in. Yes. Why not? Some human being did it. I agree with Terence. Terence said, "*Homo sum: humani nihil a me alienum puto.*" I am a human being. Nothing human can be alien to me. When you look up Terence in the encyclopedia, you see beside his name, in italics: "Sold to a Roman senator, freed by that Senator." He became the most popular playwright in Rome. Six of his plays and that statement have come down to us from 154 B.C. This man, not born white, not born free, without any chance of ever receiving citizenship, said, "I am a human being. Nothing human can be alien to me." Well, I believe that. I ingested that, internalized that at about thirteen or twelve. I believed if I set my mind to it, maybe I wouldn't be published, but I would write a great piece of music, or do something about becoming a real friend. Yes, I would do something wonderful. It might be with my next door neighbor, my gentleman friend, with my lover, but it would be wonderful as far as I could do it. So I never have been very concerned about the world telling me how successful I am. I don't need that.

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INTERVIEWER

You mentioned courage . . .

ANGELOU

. . . the most important of all the virtues. Without that virtue you can't practice any other virtue with consistency.

INTERVIEWER

What do you think of white writers who have written of the black experience: Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury,* or William Styron's *Confessions of Nat Turner?*

ANGELOU

Well, sometimes I am disappointed—more often than not. That's unfair, because I'm not suggesting the writer is lying about what he or she sees. It's my disappointment, really, in that he or she doesn't see more deeply, more carefully. I enjoy seeing Peter O'Toole or Michael Caine enact the role of an upper-class person in England. There the working class has had to study the upper-class, has been obliged to do so, to lift themselves out of their positions. Well, black Americans have had to study white Americans. For centuries under slavery, the smile or the grimace on a white man's face, or the flow of a hand on a white woman could inform a black person: "You're about to be sold, or flogged." So we have studied the white American, where the white American has not been obliged to study us. So often it is as if the writer is looking through a glass darkly. And I'm always a little—not a little—saddened by that poor vision.

INTERVIEWER

And you can pick it up in an instant if you . . .

ANGELOU

Yes, yes. There are some who delight and inform. It's so much better, you see, for me, when a writer like Edna St. Vincent Millay speaks so deeply about her concern for herself, and does not offer us any altruisms. Then when I look through her

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eyes at how she sees a black or an Asian my heart is lightened. But many of the other writers disappoint me.

INTERVIEWER

What is the best part of writing for you?

ANGELOU

Well, I could say the end. But when the language lends itself to me, when it comes and submits, when it surrenders and says "I am yours, darling"—that's the best part.

INTERVIEWER

You don't skip around when you write?

ANGELOU

No, I may skip around in revision, just to see what connections I can find.

INTERVIEWER

Is most of the effort made in putting the words down onto the paper, or is it in revision?

ANGELOU

Some work flows, and you know, you can catch three days. It's like . . . I think the word in sailing is "scudding"—you know, three days of just scudding. Other days it's just awful—plodding and backing up, trying to take out all the ands, ifs, tos, fors, buts, wherefores, therefores, howevers; you know, all those.

INTERVIEWER

And then, finally, you write "The End" and there it is; you have a little bit of sherry.

ANGELOU

A lot of sherry then.

—George Plimpton

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Alexander Thorburn

The Beach

The beach is a balance oscillating
in the sunlight, it is a see-saw
  our town gleams on.
From our island, we watch its tin roofs
disappear among the layers of clouds . . .

The beach is a telescope
we lay on its side, it is a column
blocking our path.
Its Corinthian capital swells out at us—
  a lizard's throat
marbled in a circle of acanthus.

Or else the beach is a swing
suspended from a branch
as it sweeps rhythmically past.
  It is a back and forth
hide and seek—its shape
a cross worn smooth as a mirror,
  just out of reach.

The beach is a wheel, it is an hourglass
  turning over and over
as we scramble away.

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The beach is a Mayan ball-court,
it is a baton spinning past the mouths
of jade jaguars—it is
  a swatch of white sand it pulls
from a pocket, and waves to us.

Sliding along its beam, we stumble
on its Chinese jumprope of vines,
and fall,
  our town reappearing, a platform
flowers spill from as doves call . . .

And now it is a woman swimming toward us
  with circular strokes,
it is a message we run up to,
and swiftly unroll.

The beach is a spring
we can hold ajar only so long,

  it is a green eye closing
deep in its island, as a closer eye opens.

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Two Poems by Catherine Bowman

Can You Tell Us Something About Him?

Well, he can sell the whole dog, the long, the short
with all its parts, nothing missing, sliced and chunked.
The bole, the bulk, the stem, the stalk, the hulk.
Canned chili, farm machinery, mixed nuts, insect spray,
frozen gourmet stuff. Carries a styro cooler and stash
of lucky clubs in the trunk. Has on occasion aced
a player of great repute. No doubt likes the booze.
Ate a lamb's eye once. Knows all the words to Dark Town
Poker Club by heart. Damn smart. Good joke teller,
sometimes land speculator. Not much for blood sports.

So there he was hunting quail sixty miles south of
Pearsall where lizard smells spice the air and mesquite
branches rise upward like lustral fists of fundamentalists
ravenous for heaven. There he was, there it was, the hog,
I mean. The javelina, dead in the clearing. A cloven-footed
colossus, mean as hell, with its voluminous dead snout
coiled into a dead smile. Oily-tusked and humped, ready
to dissolve into the next world. *How'd it die?* Don't know,
weren't no bullet holes, trap gashes, broken bones, no
sign of poisoning, disease, or tampering with by man nor
beast.
And all around the cadaver stood a living halo of fifteen
quail
spelling up commotions of scratches and hoots and pecks,
and everything else in a quail's power to rejoice
in the death of a mortal enemy. *Did he shoot?* He didn't.
Would you say he's an honest man? I would. *What are his
eyes like?*
Pale and small. *And his hands?* Smooth and freckled
with tiny blond hairs growing out of the knuckles.

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LBJ Ranch Barbecue

Waist deep, almost naked, evening time soak,
a dozen Rajah bellies, a dozen Titan schnauzes,
wade in chlorinated *agua* toasting to the tune
of charismatic oratory and little Jimmy swing.
Two thousand pounds of Grade A *carne* vaporize
the heat. He has the biggest pecker in the pool,
politically speaking, it's his pool,
his party, his hands that snakewrap
the testicles of his guests until they say yes.
And they swim in formation, smooth Homo sapiens
gliding into the deep end toward the white
telephone poised on the lip of the diving board,
ringing.

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D.P. Skrief

Opened Views

In Regent's Park the cleanup's incomplete.
Though weeks have passed, it seems it's still occurring.
You drive. We talk. Ambition is a theme.

More lie downed nearer Surrey. You insist
I'm not to tell your parents you now smoke.
Old lovers, then, are out, I know; and news
You see a spiritualist.

Cedars in the circle drive stand untouched.
Your mother's there. Then Daddy. He's surprised
And glad I'm not the one he thought I was.
Although your sister's late, we'll lunch on time.
My room, I find, looks out on broken boughs.

My name. "The little dining room should do."
"That's eighty brace. A City butcher buys
The unclaimed birds." "The Crippled Children's. Boards."
It came at two a.m. "Green leaves were seared.
Right on the trees."

I'm lent a pair of wellingtons, a hat,
And mackintosh. Your sister's husband can't
Encompass all the opened views. "Imagine.
Centuries old, these."

The lab pup maps fresh tangles jubilant
To be unleashed. We part to circle roots
Upturned from craters lined with sand. "I've seen
Tornadoes." "Yes." He'd played those odds at Lloyd's.

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Your father's legs can't make it up a bank.
You whisper. "Did you see?" We follow him
Across the road, then loop and amble round
To new-cleared paths. "There's Vicar!"—who is told
A brace for him hangs curing in the shed.

A neat stack of split windfall feeds the flames.
I watch you, red-cheeked, watch your father sleep
Deep-breathing in his chair. Soon Mummy wheels
The tea cart in, with homemade birthday cake.
Another year. You wish and blow. The dinner fills
The evening.

Good-nights are on the landing. Knobby-kneed
In shirt and shorts, your father shares a tale
Of how his father's ship alone survived
A battle off a South Sea shore. I'm glad
For you, rooted to the spot, eyes wide.

I float on wine while cold creeps up my feet.
Despite a water bottle, I can't sleep.
Verges of sense grow thick with thoughts on love.
Then dreams of empty woods I knew at home.

We don't turn back next morning even though
The guest book lies unsigned. You drive and smoke.
Our talk is all good-byes and see-you-whens.
The workmen all along the road repair
The toppled walls and cart the fallen limbs.
The saplings bend away from ghosts of oaks.

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Two Poems by Maxine Chernoff

Measuring

We're watching the sad movie
for the seventh time today.
Let's take off our tear-vial
glasses and observe: Like
yawns, tears travel
the audience: dumb tears,
Cockney tears, red, white
and blue tears, touching-
only-to-his-mother-tears.
Leaky tear valves fill
the Potomac. Frenchmen
cry into their berets.
Children cry on the metal decks
of ocean liners. I'd like
to cry with you for just
one minute, five short of
the national average for
women, but then again I'm no
average woman. We could
conquer television with our
true emotions, make announcers
weep and ad executives foam
like geysers. I'll cry over
the burnt English muffin
on my plate. You'll cry
into the sink. What are
tears like? Variety shows,
doorkeepers who've lost
their keys, mothers-in-law

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naked, a shabby church
where a madonna is said
to have wept last Tuesday.
We lose patience with our
own grand gestures. We are
left with one memento,
the saddest of them all,
our desire to emote like
factory chimneys in December.

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The Painter Discusses "Apples"

I want to be
simple as a child.
The earth is green.
The sky is blue.
Outline of flowers
subtle as a lisp.
The man is average.
The leaves are canvas.
I have implied
a garden. It is wish-
fulfillment.
We will vanish
at the blossoming.

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from A Man Asleep

Georges Perec

You are sitting, naked from the waist up, wearing only pajama bottoms, in your garret, on the narrow bench that serves as your bed, with a book. Raymond Aron's *Eighteen Lectures on Industrial Society*, resting on your knees, open at page one-hundred and twelve.

At first it's just a sort of lassitude or tiredness, as if you suddenly became aware that for a long time, for several hours, you have been succumbing to an insidious, numbing discomfort, not exactly painful but nonetheless intolerable, succumbing to the sickly-sweet and stifling sensation of being without muscles or bones, of being a sack of potatoes surrounded by other sacks of potatoes.

The sun beats down on the zinc flashings on the roof. In front of you, at eye-level, on a whitewood shelf, there is a half-empty, rather grubby bowl of Nescafé, an almost empty bag of sugar, a cigarette burning down in a whitish mock opaline ashtray bearing an advertiser's logo.

Someone is moving around in the next room, coughing, dragging his feet, moving furniture, opening drawers. Drops of water are continually forming on the drinking water tap on the landing. Noises drift up from Rue Saint-Honoré far below.

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The bells of Saint-Roch chime two. You look up, you stop reading, but you had already stopped long ago. You put the open book down beside you on the bed. You reach out your hand, you stub out the cigarette which is smoking in the ashtray, you finish your bowl of Nescafé: it is barely lukewarm, too sweet, on the bitter side.

You are soaked in sweat. You get up, you go over to the window and close it. You turn on the faucet in the tiny washbasin, you pass a damp washcloth over your forehead, the back of your neck, your shoulders. You curl up sideways on the narrow bench. You close your eyes. Your head is heavy, your legs numb.

Later, the day of your exam comes and you do not get up. It's not a premeditated action, or rather it's not an action at all, but an absence of action, an action you do not perform, actions that you avoid performing. You went to bed early, you slept peacefully, you had set the alarm clock, you heard it go off, you waited for it to go off, for several minutes at least, already woken by the heat, or by the light, or by the noise of the milkmen, the garbage collectors, or by the expectation itself.

Your alarm clock goes off, you do not stir, you remain in your bed, you close your eyes again. Other alarms start ringing in adjacent rooms. You hear the sounds of running water, doors closing, steps hurrying down the stairs. Rue Saint-Honoré begins to fill up with car noises, the screeching of tires, the crunching of gears, toots on the horn. Blinds slam open, shopkeepers raise their iron shutters.

You do not move; you will not move. Someone else, your twin, a ghostly, conscientious double is perhaps performing in your stead, one by one, the actions you have eschewed: he gets up, washes, shaves, dresses, goes out. You let him bound down the stairs, run down the street, leap onto the moving bus, arrive on time, out of breath but triumphant, at the doors of the hall. Certificate of Advanced Study in General Sociology. First written paper.

You get up too late. Back there in the hall, studious or bored heads are bowed pensively over their desks. The perhaps anx-

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ious glances of your friends all converge on your still-vacant seat. You will not set down on four, eight or twelve sheets of paper what you know, what you think, what you know you are supposed to think, about alienation, the workers, modernity and leisure, about white-collar workers or about automation, about our knowledge of others, about Marx as a rival of de Tocqueville, about Weber as an opponent of Lukacs. In any case, you wouldn't have said anything, because you don't know a great deal and you think nothing at all. Your seat remains vacant. You won't finish your degree, you won't begin a post-graduate thesis. You will study no more.

You make, as you do every day, a bowl of Nescafé; you add, as you do every day, a few drops of sweetened condensed milk. You don't wash, you hardly bother to dress. In a pink plastic bowl you place three pairs of socks to soak.

You don't go and wait for the candidates to come out of the examination hall to find out what questions were devised to test their perspicacity. Neither do you go and join your friends in the café, as custom would have demanded, like every other day, but more especially on this day of exceptional gravity. One of them, the following morning, will climb the six flights of stairs that lead to your room. You will recognise his footfall on the stairs, you will let him knock on your door, wait, knock again, a little louder, look on the lintel over the door for the key that you would often leave there if you were going out for a few minutes to fetch bread, coffee, cigarettes, a newspaper or the mail, you'll let him wait a while longer, knock gently, call your name quietly, hesitate, then stamp back down again.

He came back, later, and slipped a note under the door. Then others came, the day after, the day after that, knocked, looked for the key, called your name, slipped notes under the door.

You read the notes and crumple them into a ball. The notes are to arrange meetings which you miss. You stay lying on your narrow bench, your hands crossed behind your neck, your knees up. You look at the ceiling and you discover the cracks, the bits flaking off, the stains, the uneven contours. You do not want to see anyone, or to talk, or think, or go out, or move.

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It is on a day like this one, a little later, a little earlier, that you discover, without surprise, that something is wrong, that, without mincing words, you don't know how to live, that you will never know.

The sun beats down on the sheet metal of the roof. The heat in your garret is unbearable. You are sitting, wedged between the bed and the bookshelf, with a book open on your lap. You stopped reading it long ago. You are staring at a whitewood shelf, at a pink plastic bowl in which six socks are stagnating. The smoke from your cigarette, abandoned in the ashtray, rises, in an almost straight line, and then spreads out in a quivering blanket against the ceiling which is fissured by minute cracks.

Something was going to break, something has broken. You no longer feel—how to put it?—held up: it is as if some thing which, it seemed to you, it seems to you, fortified you until then, gave warmth to your heart, something like the feeling of your existence, of your importance almost, the impression of belonging to or of being in the world, is starting to slip away from you.

And yet you are not one of those people who spend their waking hours wondering if they exist, and why, where they came from, what they are, where they are going. You have never seriously agonized over the chicken and the egg. Metaphysical torments have not significantly ravaged your noble countenance. But nothing remains of that arrow-like trajectory, of that forward movement in which, for as long as you can remember, you have been led to recognize as your life, that is to say its meaning, its truth, its tension: a past rich in fruitful experiences, lessons well learned, joyous childhood memories, sun-bathed country idylls, bracing sea breezes, a dense present, compact and taut, like a coiled spring, a productive, verdant, airy future. Your past, your present and your future merge into one: they are now just the heaviness of your limbs, your nagging migraine, your lassitude, the heat, the bitterness of the lukewarm Nescafé. And, if your life needed a setting, it would not be the majestic esplanade (by and large a spectacular trick of perspective) where the chubby-cheeked chil-

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dren of triumphant humanity fly past and frolic, but rather, irrespective of any effort you may make or any illusions you may still harbor, this converted cubbyhole that passes for your bedroom, this garret two meters ninety-two long by one meter sixty-three wide, that is to say, a little over five square meters, this attic from which you have not stirred for several hours, several days: you are sitting on a bed which is too short for you to be able to lie on it, full length, at night, and too narrow for you to be able to turn over on it, without extreme care. You are staring, almost fascinated now, at a pink plastic bowl which contains no fewer than six socks.

You stay in your room, without eating, without reading, almost without moving. You stare at the bowl, the shelf, your knees, your own gaze in the cracked mirror, the coffee-bowl, the light-switch. You listen to the sounds of the street, the dripping tap on the landing, the noises that your neighbor makes, clearing his throat, opening and closing drawers, coughing fits, the whistle of his kettle, you follow across the ceiling the sinuous lines of a thin crack, the futile meandering of a fly, the progress—which is almost possible to plot—of the shadows.

This is your life. This is yours. You can establish an exact inventory of your meager fortune, the precise balance sheet of your first quarter-century. You are twenty-five years old, you have twenty-nine teeth, three shirts and eight socks, a few books you no longer read, a few records you no longer play. You do not want to remember anything else, be it your family or your studies, your friends and lovers, or your holidays and plans. You traveled and you brought nothing back from your travels. Here you sit, and you want only to wait, just to wait until there is nothing left to wait for: for night to fall and the passing hours to chime, for the days to slip away and the memories to fade.

You do not see your friends again. You do not open your door. You do not go down to fetch your mail. You do not take back the books you borrowed from the Library of the Institute of Education. You do not write to your parents.

You only go out after nightfall, like the rats, the cats and

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the monsters. You drift around the streets, you slip into the grubby little cinemas on the Grands Boulevards. Sometimes you walk all night, sometimes you sleep all day.

You are a man of leisure, a sleepwalker, a mollusk. The definitions vary according to the hour of the day, or the day of the week, but the meaning remains clear enough: you do not really feel cut out for living, for doing, for making; you want only to go on, to go on waiting, and to forget.

Such an outlook on life is generally not much appreciated in modern times: all around you, all your life, you have seen the esteem in which action is held, and grand designs, and enthusiasm: man straining forward, man with his gaze fixed on the horizon, man looking-straight ahead. A clear gaze, a purposeful chin, a confident swagger, stomach held in. Staying power, initiative, strokes of brilliance, success: all of these things map out the too transparent path of a too exemplary existence, constitute the sacrosanct images of the struggle for life. The white lies, the comforting illusions of all those who are running on the spot, sinking deeper into the mire, the lost illusions of the thousands left on society's scrap heap, those who arrived too late, those who put their suitcase down on the pavement and sat on it to wipe their brow. But you no longer need excuses, regrets, nostalgia. You reject nothing, you refuse nothing. You have ceased going forward, but that is because you weren't going forward anyway, you're not setting off again, you have arrived, you can see no reason to go any further: all it took, practically for a day in May when it was too hot, was the untimely conjunction of a text of which you'd lost the thread, a bowl of Nescafé that suddenly tasted too bitter, and a pink-plastic bowl filled with blackish water in which six socks were floating, this was all it took for something to snap, to turn bad, to come undone, and for the truth to appear in the bright light of day—but the light of day is never bright in the garret on Rue Saint-Honoré—this disappointing truth, as sad and ridiculous as a dunce's cap, as heavy as a Latin dictionary: you have no desire to carry on, no desire to defend yourself, no desire to attack.

Your friends got tired of knocking on your door. Now, you

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rarely ever frequent the streets where you might run into them. You avoid the questions and the eyes of strangers whom chance occasionally places in your path, you refuse the beer or the coffee they offer you. Only the night and your room protect you: the narrow bed where you lie stretched out, the ceiling that you discover anew at every moment; the night in which, alone amidst the crowds on the Grands Boulevards, you occasionally feel almost happy with the noise and the lights, the bustle and the forgetting. You have no need to speak, to desire. You follow the tide as it ebbs and flows, from Place de la République to Place de la Madeleine, from Place de la Madeleine to Place de la République.

You are not in the habit of making diagnoses, and you don't want to start now. What is worrying you, what is disturbing you, what is frightening you, but which now and then gives you a thrill, is not the suddenness of your metamorphosis, but precisely the opposite: the vague and heavy feeling that it isn't a metamorphosis at all, that nothing has changed, that you've always been like this, even though you only now realize it fully: that thing, in the cracked mirror, is not your new face, it is just that the masks have slipped, the heat in your room has melted them, your torpor has soaked them off. The masks of unswerving conviction, of the straight and narrow. Did you never have an inkling, not once in twenty-five years, of that which, today, has already become inexorable? Did you never see any cracks in what, for you, takes the place of a history? Times when nothing was happening, times when you were simply ticking over in neutral. The fleeting and poignant desire to hear no more, to see no more, to remain silent and motionless. Crazy dreams of solitude. An amnesiac wandering through the Land of the Blind: wide, empty streets, cold lights, faces without mouths that you would look at without seeing. They would never get to you.

It is as if, beneath the surface of your calm and reassuring history (the good little boy, the model pupil, the dependable pal), as if, running beneath the obvious, too obvious, signs of growth and maturity—scribbled graffiti on toilet doors, certificates, long trousers, the first cigarette, the sting of the first

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shave, alcohol, the key left under the mat for your Saturday night outings, losing your virginity, the baptism of air, the baptism of fire—as if another thread had always been running, ever present but always held at bay, and which is now *weaving the familiar fabric of your rediscovered existence*, the bare backdrop of your abandoned life, memories which suddenly resurface, veiled images of this revealed truth, of this resignation so long deferred, of this appeal for calm—hazy and lifeless images, over-exposed snapshots, almost white, almost dead, almost already fossilized: a street in a sleepy provincial town, closed shutters, dull shadows, the buzzing of flies in an army post, a lounge draped in grey dustsheets, particles suspended in a ray of sunlight, bare countryside, cemeteries on a Sunday, outings in a car.

Man sitting on a narrow bed, one Thursday afternoon, a book open on his knees, eyes vacant.

You are just a murky shadow, a hard kernel of indifference, a neutral gaze avoiding the gaze of others. Speechless lips, dead eyes. Henceforth you will be able to glimpse in the puddles, in the shop windows, in the gleaming bodywork of cars, the fleeting reflections of your decelerating life.

Absent-mindedly, you let your hand slip along the white-wood shelf. Water drips from the tap on the landing. Your neighbor is sleeping. The faint chugging of a stationary diesel taxi emphasizes rather than breaks the silence of the street. Your memory is slowly penetrated by oblivion. Nothing has happened. Nothing will every happen. The cracks in the ceiling trace an implausible labyrinth.

There were those empty days, the heat in your room, like a cauldron, like a furnace, and the six socks, indolent sharks, sleeping whales, in the pink plastic bowl. That alarm clock that did not ring, that does not ring, that will not ring to wake you up. You put down the open book beside you on the bed, you stretch out. The sluggish, dull, throb of torpor. You let yourself slip. You drop into sleep.

—translated from the French
by Andrew Leak

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Two Poems by Paul Celan

Homecoming

Snowfall, thicker and thicker,
dovecolored, like yesterday,
snowfall, as if you had been asleep just now.

Into the distance, the stacked-up whiteness
and beyond, endless,
the sleightrace of the lost.

Below, hidden,
pushing itself upward,
what hurts the eyes so much,
mound after mound,
invisible.

On each mound,
brought home to its today,
sucked down into its muteness: an I,
a wooden post.

There: a feeling—
blown across by the icewind,
it fastens its dove-, its snow-
colored cloth bannerwise.

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Love Crown

Now autumn nibbles its leaf from my hand: we are
friends.
We take time out of a nutshell and teach it how to go:
time turns and goes back into its shell.

Now in the mirror it is Sunday,
in the dream there is a place for the calm of sleep,
in the mouth, the taste of truth.

My eye moves down the belly of my love:
we see one another,
we speak the darkness to ourselves,
we love one another like poppy and remembrance,
we sleep like the liquor in seashells,
like the ocean in the bloodbeams of the moon.

We stand at the window embracing, they see us from the
street,
it is time they knew!
It is time that the stone let itself break into flower,
that the unresting heart beat.
It is time there was time.

It is time.

—translated from the German
by Robert Pinsky

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Adventures with J.P. Donleavy

or

How I lost my job & made my way to greater glory

Seymour Lawrence

I first met J.P. Donleavy in July, 1961 at a garden party in London on what was believed to be the hottest day on record. The party was given on my behalf as Director of the Atlantic Monthly Press to meet leading British publishers, writers, and literary agents.

I had asked my hostess to invite J.P. Donleavy whom I had never met, although we had corresponded for over a year about his novel in progress, *Fairy Tales of New York*. I didn't think he would turn up, since he was known to be a recluse who avoided literary parties; nor did some of my publishing friends who told me in emphatic terms that Donleavy did not like or trust publishers. About an hour after the party was in prog-

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ress, the garden crowded with London literati, a solitary figure suddenly appeared at the top of the stone steps, slim, bearded, and wearing a Brooks Brothers seersucker suit (which only Americans wore at the time). It was Donleavy, accompanied by a statuesque young lady with flowing blond hair. A number of publishers stopped what they were doing and made a beeline to shake Donleavy's hand and introduce themselves. He told me later that among them were several who had rejected *The Ginger Man* with curt one-line replies or standard printed forms. I stayed a few more minutes, in deference to my hostess, then invited Donleavy and his companion to dinner at the Connaught. She had another engagement but Donleavy was pleased to accept. He told me that he frequently went to the Connaught bar in the late afternoon for a glass of champagne, to lift his spirits and because of its vitamins (which he pronounced "vitt-amins"). After two glasses of vitt-amins we went into dinner. The Connaught menu is one of the finest in all of England, and the wine list is equally impressive. Donleavy chose steak tartare and I ordered roast duck. I asked him to select the wine and he chose a '57 Chambertin. It was an animated dinner during the course of which he asked me many questions, professional and some quite personal: what my wife was like, what my house on Beacon Hill was like, whether my children had a nanny, where I had gone to college, where did I "take lunch" in Boston, etc. He seemed to be very familiar with Boston, especially Beacon Hill, Charles Street, the Public Gardens and the West End of Boston where a good part of *The Ginger Man* had been written.

The novel we discussed at dinner was called *Fairy Tales of New York*. Donleavy had offered us the opening chapters of the novel which prompted me to phone his flat in London (he also had a house on the Isle of Man where he lived with his wife and children). He said that he had found my call "astonishing" as I spoke in such a relaxed manner about his work, totally unaware of the mounting transatlantic toll charges. It was clear that he had an emotional block about publishers because of his humiliating and traumatic experience getting *The Ginger Man* published. It had been re-

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jected over and over again by British and American publishers, perhaps as many as forty, only to find a home with The Olympia Press in Paris—where *The Ginger Man* was misrepresented and published as pornography in the lurid Traveller's Companion Series. Donleavy had good reason not to trust publishers and he was wary of them. I was determined to become his publisher.

On my return to Boston I proposed to my associates at Little, Brown that we offer an advance of $7,500 for *Fairy Tales of New York*. Little, Brown was more conservative in their view of the book's sales potential and they set a limit of $2,500. I felt this offer was inadequate and that we might lose the author, so I used my prerogative as director of the press to increase the advance to $5,000. Donleavy accepted our offer promptly.

But three weeks later he wrote:

> Unfortunately it looks like I'm going to complicate matters at this stage. I have decided to publish A SINGULAR MAN instead of A FAIRY TALE OF NEW YORK.

We agreed to substitute *A Singular Man* in the contract and airmailed agreements in September, 1961.

We had no further word from Donleavy until April, 1962 when he wrote:

> It would not be appropriate to attempt publication of A SINGULAR MAN out of Boston. The problems which beset THE GINGER MAN appear to be at the least equal in the case of A SINGULAR MAN. Therefore I am attempting to find a publisher in New York which frankly I don't feel will be easy either.

I phoned him at once to reassure him that he should not be concerned or apprehensive about the book's publication in Boston and that censorship was no longer the problem it once was. I suggested that since I would be in Europe on holiday that we meet for dinner in Paris. I invited him to fly over as our guest with the opening sections of *A Singular Man*. Two

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weeks later I had an opportunity to read the first one hundred pages of this extraordinary novel while Donleavy explored the streets of Paris. It was exciting to meet its solitary hero, George Smith, erecting his private air-conditioned mausoleum, which he visits in his bullet-proof "limozine." Smith, mysteriously rich and desperately lonely, is looked after by a bawdy black housekeeper and two secretaries, one of whom is a free-wheeling blonde named Miss Tomson, "the gay, wild and willing beauty" with whom Smith falls passionately in love. The book has great ribald moments, a Chaplinesque sadness, and sensuality equal to *The Ginger Man*.

A Singular Man was completed and airmailed to *The Atlantic* in late April, 1963. It was greeted with enthusiasm and astonished delight by all the young *Atlantic* editors. However, a senior editor who admired the book as "a strong and original piece of work," qualified his admiration and raised a red flag:

> The book is bound to get into trouble in all sorts of censorship courts. One foresees much litigation. The postal authorities will certainly be tempted to meddle. Yet I wonder if Donleavy is not merely putting into ordinary English the thoughts and deeds of most men and women.

This comment was brought to the attention of the general manager who requested the manuscript for reading. His report, which ran to nearly two pages of single-spaced type, was heavily underlined:

> I choose *not to publish* the Donleavy . . . *Not to publish* is no doubt an act of *suppression* . . . A *decision to publish* is an act of *subversion* . . . There is another world, peopled by men and women who elect continence short of wedlock. In my view, their world is just as valid as Donleavy's. Donleavy and his ilk are bent on destroying this other world. It amounts to a "party line" — *obscenity* is good, because it is *natural* — *orgasm* is the only *reality*.

On this disturbing note, I left for Europe for an extended editorial trip. My first stop was London where I planned to see

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Donleavy. In my absence the manuscript was turned over to the editor of *The Atlantic*, the chief editorial officer of the company. He took copious notes and as he read more and more he grew increasingly outraged.

> Let's not kid ourselves: this will be regarded as one of the dirtiest books in years, and action in Federal and State courts is a probability. This is the most sexual novel we have ever solicited.

Our associates at Little, Brown shared his position that the book would be attacked on grounds of pornography. Legal opinions were sought in New York and Boston, and the book was taken out of production.

Over dinner with Donleavy, I told him what was happening in Boston and he did not seem surprised. In fact he anticipated this reaction a year ago when he completed the first draft. I told him that I did not think the book was pornographic or obscene and that I was committed to its publication. I would stand by it at all costs and defend it to the rest of *The Atlantic*-Little, Brown board (of which I was the junior member). He thought this was unwise of me and that I should forget the whole business. The book wasn't worth it and I shouldn't jeopardize my career. I said, "Let's see what the lawyers say." Two days later I received the Boston lawyer's opinion:

> The book seems to be a fairly continuous satire of conventional existence, sometimes accomplished with humor. And when we consider the sexual episodes in which the hero becomes not infrequently involved, three of them have their moments of delicacy and tenderness, while the fourth is plain comical. None of them seems to be inspired by a desire to arouse lust in the reader . . . But to put it succinctly, the book is controversial.

I thought we had clear sailing but when I arrived at my next stop in Paris a cable was waiting from the editor of *The Atlantic*:

> WE DO NOT WANT "A SINGULAR MAN" UNDER OUR NAME. YOU BELIEVE YOU CAN REVERSE THIS DECI-

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> SION WHICH IS SELF-DELUDING. YOU MIGHT INQUIRE IF AUTHOR HAS OTHER NOVEL IN PROGRESS WHICH MAY MEET OUR STANDARDS. MEANWHILE I AM DRAFTING LETTER OF RELEASE WAITING YOUR RETURN. WE CANNOT FIGHT THIS WAR ALL SUMMER. HAVE FUN.

What prompted this cable was the opinion of the New York lawyer:

> This book would be at least as difficult to defend as Henry Miller's TROPIC OF CANCER which is now before the U.S. Supreme Court. With respect to A SINGULAR MAN, there is less chance of arguing successfully that it has "redeeming social importance."

I needed a break and I accepted Donleavy's invitation to spend the weekend with him, his wife and their two children on the Isle of Man. I sailed from Liverpool with a rowdy gang of leather-jacketed, beer-guzzling motorcyclists, the equivalent of the Hell's Angels, bound for their annual convention there. I kept a low profile. Donleavy was waiting on the dock, wearing dark glasses, stylishly dressed in tweed cap, tweed jacket and plus fours. When he saw my traveling companions roar off on their bikes he was horrified and said that my life had been at risk. We drove to a newly opened hotel near his house, where Donleavy had requested a room facing the sea. The room had a magnificent view but no door. I was told it would be installed later.

That evening I met Donleavy's first wife, Valerie, known as V, a slim, patrician young woman, very quiet and thoughtful, who became a Jungian therapist after their marriage. The Donleavys had invited Lord and Lady Percy to dinner. Percy was a direct descendant of Hotspur and had the long Percy beak. He had given up the high life of London to work as a lobsterman on the Isle of Man. He was dressed in rough working clothes, while Lady Percy wore an elegant, full-length satin gown. Percy didn't drink, and he said he had given up every-

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thing except sex. After a good dinner, with several bottles of excellent wine followed by vintage port, Lord Percy abstaining, Donleavy invited me to climb Maughold Head, a rugged headland high above the sea. It was pitch black and I couldn't see a thing except for intermittent flashes of light from a nearby lighthouse. We were on a precipice when my feet slipped on the heather. Donleavy caught me in time, saying, "I almost lost a publisher. One more step and you would have plunged four-hundred feet to the sea."

Before I left for the Isle of Man, I had cabled the editor of *The Atlantic*:

> REGARD DONLEAVY AS WORK OF LITERATURE TO BE PUBLISHED AND DEFENDED ACCORDINGLY.

When I returned to London I found this reply:

> YOU MUST REALIZE THE SERIOUSNESS OF OUR DILEMMA WITH DONLEAVY. NEW YORK COUNSEL WARNS US NOVEL FAIRLY CERTAIN OF PROSECUTION. BECAUSE OF MISGIVINGS AT THE ATLANTIC AND LITTLE, BROWN WE FEEL STRONGLY AUTHOR SHOULD BE PERSUADED TO WITHDRAW IT IN FAVOR OF ANOTHER PUBLISHER RETAINING ADVANCE IF HE WISHES. ESSENTIAL YOU PRESENT THIS VIEW STRONGLY AND CONVINCINGLY TO HIM. BECAUSE OF LEGAL DELICACY THIS MESSAGE SHOULD NOT BE SHOWN TO ANYONE. WE REALIZE THE DIFFICULTY OF YOUR MISSION AND TRUST YOU DO YOUR UTMOST TO BRING MATTER TO CONCLUSION SUGGESTED.

I replied by letter that to break the contract would not only be ignominious but would have damaging consequences. The book was already listed in the forthcoming Little, Brown catalogue and it was known by many people in the industry—booksellers, authors, agents and other publishers—that we had the book. I suggested an outside jury of three highly respected authors on our list—Katherine Anne Porter, Alfred

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Kazin, and Sean O'Faolain—for their confidential opinion. If the majority found the book offensive or distasteful, I would abide by the decision of the *Atlantic*-Little, Brown board and I would ask Donleavy to withdraw it. I also suggested that we show the manuscript to Felix Frankfurter. Since Justice Frankfurter was retired from the U.S. Supreme Court I felt that he could give a free and objective opinion. Both plans were rejected out of hand.

After the endless exchange of cables and letters between Boston and London, it was a relief to find a quiet place on the coast of Brittany where I couldn't be found. I knew that a letter was being drafted in Boston asking Donleavy to withdraw his book but I felt that he should hear from me first:

June, 1963

HOTEL DES BRISANTS
Pilat-Place · Gironde

Dear Mike:

I have been in constant touch with Boston since that splendid weekend with you and V on the island. There has been a succession of letters and cables across the ocean, and I will now try to convey to you what has happened to date.

The legal opinion was sobering. In no uncertain terms the New York lawyer predicted that A SINGULAR MAN would be prosecuted in many localities as violating the laws against obscenity and that it would be at least as difficult to defend as Henry Miller's TROPIC OF CANCER. In the case of TROPIC OF CANCER there were more than 60 individual prosecutions. The ultimate determination of what is obscene and what is not obscene will be decided by the United States Supreme Court when they rule on the TROPIC OF CANCER case which will take place towards the end of this year or early in 1964.

In view of all this, the Atlantic-Little, Brown board feels that you should withdraw the manuscript and cancel the contract, and offer your novel to another publisher who would not have misgivings. I am against this decision and have tried my utmost to reverse it, but to no avail.

You know by now how deeply committed I am to you as an

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author. Nor am I alone in my regard for your work. Most of our editors feel exactly as I do, and every single one of my contemporaries is with me. But there are older members of the board who reacted violently to the sexual scenes, although Lord knows there was sex in SHIP OF FOOLS, in the novels of Brian Moore, and in the work of lesser authors whom we publish. I think it was the dominance of this theme in A SINGULAR MAN which brought on such extreme reaction. And the lawyers's opinion which stated that the novel would be vulnerable to prosecution was the final straw.

My warmest greetings to you and V and I only regret having failed you in this battle. It's the first I have ever lost on behalf of an author I believe in so profoundly, and it's a bitter pill. But I do not regard the war as having been lost. It will simply take more time and patience.

Regards as ever,
SL

I returned to Boston to find that the proposed letter to Donleavy requesting cancellation of his contract had gone through several drafts on advice of counsel and Little, Brown executives. Everyone felt that I should sign the letter since I had been the sole contact with Donleavy. My letter was dated July 9, 1963 but before it had time to reach Donleavy two registered letters dated July 8, 1963 arrived at the respective offices of *The Atlantic Monthly* Press and Little, Brown & Company. The contents were identical:

Dear Sirs:

With reference to A SINGULAR MAN contract dated September, 1961 and supplementary letter concerning first serial rights dated February 18, 1963.

As a matter of courtesy and without prejudice to any other remedies, or claims in the matter of protecting my interests I hereby inform you that unless I receive an undertaking within one week of the date of receipt of this letter of your intention to publish the work A SINGULAR MAN forthwith in the best interest of the said work, I intend to seek all remedies in protecting my interests and to institute proceedings and to seek

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damages of not less than Three Hundred and Seventy Five Thousand Dollars ($375,000.00).

Yours faithfully,
J.P. Donleavy

This letter had the impact of a hand grenade. Board meetings were hastily called, phone calls were made to legal counsel—and I was left out in the cold. My senior colleagues thought I had prompted Donleavy to send the letter. But I had not. This bold and imaginative stroke was entirely Donleavy's, though I wished I had thought of it.

On July 16, 1963 the Chairman of Little, Brown wrote to Donleavy as follows:

We have reconsidered our position as set forth in Mr. Lawrence's letter to you of July 9th. Upon such reconsideration we are prepared to publish A SINGULAR MAN on November 7th as originally scheduled and in the manner originally planned. We wish you to know that we were motivated by our desire to avoid being overly censorious rather than by your threat of suit. Our attorneys advise us that we can successfully defend any suit instituted by you.

Despite our confidence that we can win any lawsuit which might be commenced in this situation, we are ready to go forward with publication of the work.

The book went through production in an orderly fashion, with Donleavy's cooperation, even to the extent of his providing original jacket art. When the original manuscript arrived in Boston, it was fastened together with bolts and screws, with the title and author's name in cut-out letters pasted on brown wrapping paper. Without knowing it, Donleavy had created his own book jacket and I told the art director: "That's the book jacket."

A Singular Man was published on schedule in November, 1963 and it received serious attention throughout the country. No one thought it was pornographic. No one said it was a dirty book. And there was no threat of censorship or prosecution. Donleavy had received an advance of $5,000 for *A Singular*

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Man, and over the years in its various editions—hardcover, paperback, book club, translations—the book has earned more than $100,000 in royalties.

It had been a battle between conventional middlebrow values and a revolutionary new voice "boiling with creativity" as one young editor put it. It had been a battle between generations. But although the battle was over, the Board of Directors would not forgive and forget. Several months after publication of *A Singular Man* I received a four-page memorandum from the editor of *The Atlantic* advising me to cancel my proposed trip to Latin America to acquire new authors, terminate my foreign program, curtail the number of books we published, cut the editorial staff, reduce overhead expenses, and *broaden my reading tastes*. In no uncertain terms it was suggested that I refrain from publishing any more authors like Donleavy who were more suited to Grove Press than *The Atlantic Monthly* Press.

An invisible force working behind the scenes was the absentee owner of *The Atlantic*, a rich woman who had inherited the company and whose principal occupation was breeding bulls. She felt that Donleavy's books were disgusting and immoral and would tarnish the image of *The Atlantic*. She had written a confidential memorandum to the Board, which I was privileged to read, in which she characterized my entire list as "second-rate and of questionable value," in an effort to force my resignation. The authors of "questionable value" I had acquired for *The Atlantic* included Katherine Anne Porter, Sean O'Faolain, Alfred Kazin, Nobel Prize winners Camile Jose Cela and George Seferis, Primo Levi, Pulitzer Prize novelist Edwin O'Connor, Howard Nemerov, Richard Yates, Brian Moore, Mordecai Richler, and a number of young writers who have since achieved fame, including J.P. Donleavy.

In November, 1964 I decided to strike out on my own with an independent imprint based on *The Atlantic*'s arrangement with Little, Brown. I began to negotiate with publishers in New York who would act as an "umbrella" for my list. Months went by and I became discouraged and beset by doubt as to whether this new venture would work out, when one day Don-

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leavy rang from London and in his soft-spoken Anglo-Irish voice, with a trace of New York City, gave me this advice: "All you need to be a publisher is one room, one desk, one phone, and one author. I'll be that author." He would give me *The Ginger Man* to publish.

* * *

In 1965, the first complete and unexpurgated edition of *The Ginger Man* was published in the United States. It was also the first book published under my imprint and it comprised my entire first list. We wanted to celebrate with a publication party at The Ginger Man restaurant in New York. Donleavy's initial reaction was to say no because he did not enjoy literary gatherings and because the owner of the restaurant, Patrick O'Neal (an actor who had played Sebastian Dangerfield in the stage version of *The Ginger Man*), was trading on the book's reputation. After much persuasion Donleavy reluctantly agreed to make a brief appearance. When he arrived at the restaurant, he beheld a crowded, noisy, smoke-filled scene of writers, reviewers, editors, agents, various media types, groupies, and that strange breed of literati who find out where the parties are and move in like piranhas for free food and drink. Donleavy was appalled by this motley sight and carefully concealed himself behind a large potted palm in a corner of the restaurant, protected by his foreign rights manager, the very elegant Tessa Sayle and myself. Very few well-wishers knew he was at the party, and even fewer managed to break through that barricade.

From then on, publication parties were held at Donleavy's residence in Ireland. The first party was in June, 1971 at Balsoon House, Donleavy's elegant Georgian mansion on the River Boyne, to celebrate the publication of his novel, *The Onion Eaters*. Friends of Donleavy arrived from all parts of the world: his mother and sister from the Bronx; Lord Dynevor, whose ancestors were the original Princes of Wales, from Dynevor Castle; old Trinity College friends including "General" A.K. Donoghue, a Harvard graduate from the wrong side of the

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tracks who was the model for the character O'Keefe in *The Ginger Man*; Lord Dunsany, the monocled heir of the famed Irish storyteller, who lived in a neighboring castle; Barrett Prettyman Jr., a distinguished Washington lawyer who frequently argued before the Supreme Court, and was a friend of the Kennedys; Prettyman's stunning, well-endowed blonde girlfriend wearing a low-cut white gown; a wax-moustached international financier who had flown from New York because he was madly in love with the second Mrs. Donleavy; actors and actresses from the Abbey Theatre in Dublin; local farmers and fox-hunting gentry; and an innocent-looking, beautiful young nun who had not yet "gone over the wall."

I had brought my fourteen-year-old daughter to Ireland to celebrate her birthday. She was to stay in the Chicken Coop, an ancient stone building at the rear of the main house. When I escorted her to her quarters I was startled to find bottles of perfume, cosmetics, a nun's habit, and various items of lingerie, including a black garter belt and black silk stockings, strewn around the room. The clothes belonged to the nun who would be my daughter's roommate for the weekend.

The party was preceded by a day at the races at The Curragh, Ireland's famous track, where our activities were covered by a team from *People* magazine who had flown in for the occasion. At the party, forty guests dined on smoked salmon, roast saddle of lamb with fresh garden vegetables, apple tart with Devonshire cream—and an endless flow of Donleavy's favorite champagne, Roederer. After dinner there were scenes that could have come from a Donleavy novel: an Irish lord competing with an American book-club editor in lustful pursuit of the nun; a proper Anglo-Irish horsewoman demanding a gun to shoot "General" Donoghue who was proclaiming in a loud voice to a gathered audience that the Irish were nothing but "a race of ignorant, superstitious peasants who never left the bogs"; and a sexy German expatriate was overheard confiding to a local farmer that "the passion has gone out of my marriage."

Four years later, we gave a party to celebrate the publication of *The Unexpurgated Code: A Complete Manual of Survival*

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& Manners (which one reviewer called "a ribald Emily Post"). The party was held at Levington Park, Donleavy's two hundred-acre estate on the shores of Loch Owel where he lives to this day as a gentleman farmer breeding Hereford cattle. For the invitation Donleavy drew the head of a grinning bow-tied fellow with words in his mouth. The guest list included many of the same people from *The Onion Eaters* party and two unexpected guests, Bianca and Mick Jagger. The Jaggers arrived without warning, in a limousine with two starlets and a film director whom Donleavy knew. Mick Jagger, a fan of Donleavy's work, had long wanted to meet the author and had driven nearly three hours across Ireland on a black starless night along narrow winding roads to Levington Park from his rented castle outside of Dublin. Donleavy was clearly disturbed by these uninvited guests, who in a flash, had totally disrupted his party. The Jaggers are look-alikes, facially and physically, and doubly charismatic. Mick wore a shirt unbuttoned to the waist and Bianca wore a diaphanous blouse. The couple had the effect of an instant aphrodisiac. Women of all ages and walks of life made a bee-line for Jagger, inviting him to one of the upstairs bedrooms or the nearest lavatory. One young woman in a mini-skirt was dispatched home to Baltimore the next morning for gross misconduct. When Donleavy saw this scene of pandemonium and sexual frenzy he quietly retreated upstairs to his bedroom, only to reappear after the Jaggers had departed.

Publication parties continued at Levington Park with each new book, but they became intimate dinner parties of a dozen guests. Donleavy would preside at the head of a long refectory table, entertaining his audience with funny stories, usually at his own expense, with Chaplinesque touches and perfect mimicry. On occasion he would serenade us with a bit of doggerel from the Ould Sod: "It's the rich what gets the pleasure. It's the poor what gets the blame. Its the same the whole world over. Isn't it a bloody shame."

Donleavy was the perfect host, always attentive to the needs of his guests, making each one feel that he or she had a special

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place of honor. These parties were surrounded by an aura of magic and had a liberating effect on guests who would make the most astonishing and intimate revelations about themselves. Donleavy's free spirit released others of their inhibitions. No one ever had a hangover the morning after, which Donleavy attributed to the quality of the champagne and wine, and that good, invigorating Irish air.

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NOTICE

This space has traditionally been used for light-hearted messages to the readership—an explanation of the extraordinary length of the masthead, news of the fortunes of the racehorse *The Paris Review*, an occasional mild request for funds. Last issue's "Notice," however, was different in tone and import. Signed by the publisher Deborah Pease, it was a letter to the National Endowment for the Arts, turning down its $10,000 grant to the magazine—an act taken because she and the editors did not feel they could countenance the restrictions required before receiving the grant. The letter reiterated the magazine's gratitude to the Endowment for its help in the past, as well as its dismay that the Endowment's survival apparently depended on caving in to its enemies.

The publisher used the word *dismal* in her assessment of the atmosphere in which the Endowment and its beneficiaries find themselves, and that seems to me quite accurate. We have gone through such times of restrictions before. I thought our readers might be interested if I described some of them.

In the early days when the magazine was printed abroad, it was the U.S. Customs we had to worry about. We dealt with a Mr. Demcy, the "Censor." I wrote about him in the short history of the magazine which appears in the twenty-fifth anniversary number (issue # 79):

> His office was on Varick Street. The desk down from him was occupied by the Customs official who specialized in woolen goods. Mr. Demcy's field was literature. Danish nudist maga-

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zines lay on top of his desk. His judgment as to whether these were obscene was a simple one: if pubic hair showed, pornographic! The only nudist magazines which could be admitted into the country were those which had been airbrushed, so that the offending areas of women playing volley-ball had taken on the alabaster sheen and innocence of children's dolls.

When I returned to New York in 1956, I would regularly visit Mr. Demcy to discuss the contents of a newly arrived issue . . . which would not be allowed off the docks until Mr. Demcy had given his okay. We would argue about what was obscene. Mr. Demcy, who read each issue from cover to cover, had a theory that since there was no legally workable definition of obscenity, each case "stood on its own merits," and that if prurient the material might endanger a "young person" or what Mr. Demcy called a "susceptible reader".

Thus, there was a great deal of discussion in the musty office on Varick Street about the typical *Paris Review* subscriber and his possible "susceptibility". Mr. Demcy agreed that the *Paris Review* reader probably would not be depicted on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* ("Not a typical Norman Rockwell, if you know what I mean," he once said.) but that nonetheless the subscribers might well be family people with youngsters who could happen upon a copy of the magazine and get to browsing through it.

I, on the other hand, provided a counter-portrait—a crag-faced subscriber who was a fusty ex-professor living alone in a made-over Vermont barn, working on his novel about patricide, a writer-manqué who subscribed to the *Review* only to verify that his own stuff was better than what was being published; as soon as he had done with it, he smugly tossed the magazine into the Franklin stove.

A great falling out with Mr. Demcy occurred with the *Paris Review* # 21, which arrived on the New York docks on the eve of the longshoremen's strike. I pleaded with Mr. Demcy to let the issue through customs before everything closed down. I assured Mr. Demcy, who had not seen an advance copy, that nothing in the issue would outrage the sensibilities of the Custom official's hypothetical "reader." I did not mention a story by Alex Trocchi, an excerpt from his novel, *Cain's Book*, in which a few formidable expletives appeared. I knew of them, of course, but they seemed so proper to the context of the story

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and its characters that I surmised that even Mr. Demcy would appreciate their appropriateness.

I was wrong. Mr. Demcy let the crates of *Paris Review* off the docks but in checking a copy the next day, he ran across the line, "Give me that spike quick or I'll slit your fucking throat!" (To find this, a single line, in a magazine of almost 200 pages of print and poetry suggests how zealously Mr. Demcy tried to protect his constituency.) In a rage he telephoned me. How dare I say that there was nothing salacious in the issue? Why, what about this "slitting throat" line in the Trocchi story (Mr. Demcy could not bring himself to say the offending word)? He went on to say that the next morning he was sending the U.S. marshalls out to bond the issue. Most likely it would end up being burned on the city dump. Where was it?

I refused to tell him. I asked Mr. Demcy if he had read the T.S. Eliot interview in the same issue? Was it not fine? Mr. Demcy was not placated. Where were the copies? Again, I would not say. Mr. Demcy hung up. Since the crates were in the distribution company's warehouse, which Mr. Demcy might well guess, and dispatch his marshalls there, I led a crew of *Review* people to the warehouse that evening; a number of the crates were spirited away to various cellars in the Village.

Eventually the proper authorities in Washington reviewed the issue # 21 and determined that it was not anything that should end up on the city dump. The subscribers eventually got their copies. Thereafter, the gap between the antiquated codes of the Customs and those of the U.S. Mails, whose censorship authority had been so drastically changed by the implications of various court cases, especially Roth vs. the United States in 1957, became indistinguishable; the *Review* never had to deal with Mr. Demcy again.

He retired in 1965. He was very proud of a book he published during his years with the Customs people. It was entitled, *How To Cope With United States Customs*—dedicated to his mother, whose name was Reggie. I received an inscribed copy.

I have always wondered what Mr. Demcy would have made of a strange case involving *The Paris Review* which occurred a decade later. At a John Birch Society meeting at a library in South Farmingdale, Long Island. A member of that ultra-

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right wing organization sitting in the back row leaned back in his chair and removed by chance a copy of *The Paris Review* from the shelves. Somewhat to the discomfort of the evening's feature speaker, I would have thought, he began browsing through it (issue #38). He was horrified by what he came across in a story by Dallas Wiebe entitled "Skyblue at the Dump"—namely a lyrical description of a rather dowdy schoolteacher (her head spinning with visions of the miscegenative acts in the Greek myths) being made love to by a bull. Removing the copy from the library (apparently with some difficulty because a charge of third-degree assault was made by a woman librarian), the aggrieved testified later at his trial for petty larceny that he had done so "to alleviate what I felt to be an imminent threat to the moral welfare of my children." An echo of Mr. Demcy's worries! The jury did not agree this gave him the right to remove the magazine; it took only 28 minutes to find him guilty.

About this time (the late sixties) I began to have problems of my own with a National Endowment project eventually entitled *The American Literary Anthology*. Roger Stevens, the first Endowment head, had called me in to devise a program to help the literary magazines and their contributors. The plan was to publish an annual volume of the best work—fiction, poetry, essays—selected from the country's magazines. National Endowment funds were to be used not only for publication costs but to pay contributors—$1,000 for prose material, $500 for each poem, and to reward the magazine ($250) in which the work first appeared. It was a sensible concept—a simple way of fulfilling what writers, especially those making no compromise with public taste, hope to get from their labors . . . recognition, distribution, and compensation. My own involvement was to oversee the project.

For the second volume of the *Anthology*, the panel of judges selected a poem by Aram Saroyan. An example of the "calligraphic" form with which he was experimenting at the time. The poem in its entirety only had seven letters ("Lighght"). Its brevity caught (and held!) the eye of a congressman from Iowa, William Scherle, an arch-critic of the Na-

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tional Endowment and its programs. The fact that American taxpayers had paid $500 for Saroyan's effort, along with $250 to the editor of the *Chicago Review* where the poem had appeared, outraged him. The poem was not pornographic or blasphemous; it was too *short*! Scherle flailed away on the floor of the Congress. He referred to me as a "dilettante." Editorial and letter columns had a field day. Readers sent in caustic and even shorter imitations of *Lighght*. I remember travelling to Washington in the forlorn hope of explaining to Scherle the importance of "little magazines," their function in the literary community, their importance, and perhaps even an explanatory word or two about "calligraphic" poetry. Alas, no luck. He wouldn't see me. I remember an aide proudly pointing out an "artwork" in the anteroom—a painting of an Iowa corncob done by a woman who had lost control of her limbs and had done the job "with just the use of her teeth."

How did the Endowment behave on this occasion? "Frightened," was my opinion at the time, pretty much what it is today watching the Endowment knuckling under—however practical the solutions—to such William Scherle clones as Pat Robertson and Jesse Helms. The Endowment's support of the Anthology program was soon dropped—the first indication I can recall suggesting it felt public taste and reaction should be a determinant in the awarding of grants.

The problem always has been that the relationship between government authorities (representing the public, of course) and the arts is an uneasy one at best. Blasphemy, pornography, have been the sticking points. And politics. During the Depression the New Deal's Federal Writers' Project benefited thousands of writers (none receiving more than $100 a month, incidentally) and resulted in hundreds of books and pamphlets; it was extinguished after eight years, mainly by the efforts of the Martin Dies Committee convinced that the Project guides were vehicles for left-wing propaganda. What a circus *that* was! A Congressman Starnes on the Committee tried to attack Hallie Flanagan, a Project director, for praising the Russian theater as "live and vital." He persisted by quoting a

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phrase from an article she had written, "Marlowesque madness."

"Who is this Marlowe?" he wanted to know. "Is he a Communist?" Mrs. Flanagan explained that she meant Christopher Marlowe. Starnes who had apparently never heard of Marlowe, asked Mrs. Flanagan to "tell us who Marlowe is." Mrs. Flanagan asked that it be put in the record that Marlowe was "the greatest dramatist in the period of Shakespeare, immediately preceding Shakespeare." A shout of laughter went up which apparently silenced Starnes, but only for the rest of the session.

I can never consider these matters without recalling Ralph Ginzburg's frightening experience in the 1960s. He was the editor of *Eros*—a beautifully designed magazine with a hard cover, no advertising, and slick pages. Its contents were relatively highbrow, and its illustrative work certainly mild by today's standards—nude photographs of Marilyn Monroe, tasteful photographic studies in black and white of a black male and a white woman, both nude. (Ginzburg has wondered since if his problems would have lessened if the sexes in those photographs had been reversed.)

What in fact got Ginzburg into trouble was not so much the material selected for his magazine but that he had made enquiries of the post offices of two small villages in Pennsylvania with the improbable names of Intercourse and Blue Ball (the four hamlets, Bird In Hand, Intercourse, Paradise, and Blue Ball, are linked in a row on Route 340 in Central Pennsylvania) asking if they could handle a mailing drive for *Eros*. How appropriate to have the postmarks on their solicitations! The post office people in Intercourse and Blue Ball were not disrespectful. They replied that their post offices were no more than siderooms off a grocery store; they simply couldn't handle the enormous mailing drive Ginzburg had in mind.

The mere suggestion of doing this rather clever, if not charming, promotion ran afoul of the pandering prohibitions implicit in *Roth v. U.S.* A federal matter, the Attorney Gen-

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eral's Office initiated proceedings. So did the fact that Ginzburg's regular mailing outlet was Middlesex, N.J., milder in innuendo than the Pennsyvania hamlets but with a post office capable of mailing out 120,000 copies of *Eros*. The contents of *Eros* #4 also raised federal hackles—a feature entitled *Love in the Bible* (Rembrandt illustrations), an article on female impersonators, an Allen Ginsberg photo of a naked woman viewed at a distance from the rear, selections from Frank Harris's *My Life and Loves*, an article by a *Time* senior editor entitled *Was Shakespeare a Homosexual?*, a collection of bawdy limericks etc. etc. In Philadelphia's Third District Court, Ginzburg was sentenced to five years in prison by a Judge Body (who referred to him as a "menace to society"). Ironically, while this was going on, the United States Information Service (USIS) had a traveling exhibition overseas which featured *Eros* as an example of the best of American periodicals.

The appeals went through the courts for ten years. In 1972 the Supreme Court voted 5–4 to uphold the conviction. Ginzburg, absolutely incredulous, planned to chain himself to the pillars of the Jefferson Memorial rather than surrender himself to the U.S. marshalls. He was persuaded by his lawyer to forego any dramatization of his plight. "Man, you're out in two weeks. Don't blow it."

Ginzburg acquiesed. He told me it was the worst professional decision of his life. He served eight months of the five year sentence and paid a fine of $30,000, which wiped him out. Justice Potter Stewart of the Supreme Court said in a speech in Boston a few weeks later that the Court's decision was the worst since Dred Scott. Ginzburg is at present a staff photographer with the *New York Post*.

* * *

H.L. Mencken was asked years after the famous "Hatrack" case (in which, to initiate proceedings against Boston's Watch And Ward Society, he purposely published a story about a

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midwestern small-town prostitute who apparently looked like a hatrack and accommodated her customers in a cemetary) whether if he had to do it all over again would he have published "Hatrack." Mencken exclaimed, "Hell, no. . . . My mistake in "Hatrack" was that I didn't follow my own advice. If you're going to fight the moralists, fight them with something that has high literary value in itself, not something you're ashamed of. Fighting for a principle with a piece of inferior goods is sheer foolishness."

This was the problem with the Robert Mapplethorpe photographs whose showing to the public was the primary cause of the National Endowment's recent difficulties. The specific seven photographs causing all the furor—the so-called "X-Portfolio"—are hardly representative of Mapplethorpe's artistic ability. "Inferior goods." We had a chance to publish them in *The Paris Review*. A lot of headshaking on our part and a quick return of the photos to the Whitney. Indeed, I was astonished that the Corcoran Gallery felt the portfolio even belonged in a Mapplethorpe retrospective.

But this is not the point, of course. It was our editorial decision to return the X-Portfolio, not one that was dictated by official restrictions. One knows that across the country restaurants have framed notices announcing in large red letters the occupancy allowances. Quite understandable. But the same kind of restrictive notice, framed and hanging in front of an editor's desk, was not something that we here at *The Paris Review* could condone or even imagine. We felt we had to take some action, much as J.P. Donleavy felt compelled to do so, as is described in Sam Lawrence's account elsewhere in these pages. Hence the "Notice" in the last issue.

To explain our position, I went down to Washington to testify before a Congressional committee. A number of people from the arts were in the hearing room—Roy Lichtenstein, Robert Rauschenburg, Jessica Tandy, Joe Papp (who spoke twenty passionate minutes more than he was allotted) and a pianist, a beneficiary of an N.E.A. grant whose rendition of Ravel's "Bolero" practically demolished a stand up Yamaha piano. The committee chairman was Congressman Sidney Yates

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from Illinois. At one point a witness apologetically began his testimony by saying that he didn't have much to add . . . that everything had already been said. Yates grinned and interrupted to repeat a remark made years ago in a similar situation by Congressman Smoot (of the Smoot-Harley Tariff Act) that "Yes, everything has been said, but not everybody has said it."

When my turn came to say what had already been said, in part it came out as follows:

"The Paris Review gets 20,000 manuscripts a year. We read everything. Some of the stuff is very bad. The worst piece of mail received this year was a document outlining "General Terms and Conditions For Organizational Grant Recipients" to be agreed to and signed before a grant can be received. Not only as an example of overinflated use of language, but as a guideline, it is truly an insult. One can imagine the distaste with which the document would have been handled (between thumb and forefinger, one would only guess) by such literary magazine editors as Margaret Anderson, James Laughlin, Robert McAlmon, Ford Maddox Ford, Marguerite Caetani, T.S. Eliot, Richard Hugo, Marianne Moore, Philip Rhav, William Philips, Malcolm Cowley, Edmund Wilson and others, before being dropped in a wastepaper basket."

I said a few more words and concluded. If I had had more time, I would have mentioned what appeared in a previous "Notice" in this magazine—that the perfect relationship between patron and artist (the sort of working arrangement that could exist between the National Endowment and its beneficiaries) was how Tchaikovsky and his patroness from 1877–1890, Nadejda von Meck, worked things out: Despite her considerable financial help, there would be no personal relationship between the two; if they happened to meet at concerts it was said they never talked; he acknowledged her presence with a bow. The dedication of an occasional symphony was sufficient. Here at the Review, we hope that the doner/recipient relationship at the National Endowment can be worked out along these lines.

—G.A.P.

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

FICTION

Ian MacMillan is the author of *Proud Monster* (North Point Press). "Immaculate Conception" is an excerpt from his upcoming novel, *Orbit of Darkness*, to be published by Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich in the spring of 1991. He is a professor of English at the University of Hawaii.

Bradford Morrow is the author of the novels *Come Sunday* (Collier) and *The Almanac Branch*, which Simon and Schuster will publish in 1991. *A Bestiary* will be published by Grenfell Press this winter. He is the editor of *Conjunctions*, and teaches at Bard College.

Georges Perec (1932–1982) is the author *Things*, *W*, *A Man Asleep*, and *Life: A User's Manual*. **Andrew Leak** is a lecturer in French at University College, London.

Mona Simpson is the author of *Anywhere But Here*, a novel published by Knopf. Her work has been anthologized in *The Best American Short Stories, The Pushcart Prize* and *Twenty Under Thirty*. Her next novel, *The Lost Father*, will be published by Knopf and Faber in 1991. She is a Bard Center Fellow and an advisory editor of *The Paris Review*.

POETRY

John Ashbery's most recent collection of poetry is *April Galleons*, published by Viking. A collection of his art criticism, *Reported Sightings: Art Chronicles, 1957–1987*, was published by Knopf last year. His 1975 volume, *Self-*

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Portrait in a Convex Mirror, won the Pulitzer Prize, the National Book Award, and the National Book Critics Circle Award. He has also received Yale University's Bollingen Prize, a MacArthur Prize fellowship and two Guggenheim fellowships. He is a Distinguished Professor at the City University of New York, and lives in New York City.

Attilio Bertolucci is one of Italy's most eminent living poets. His friend and translator **Charles Tomlinson**'s most recent books of verse are *Annunciations* (Oxford) and *Selected Poems* (Exile Editions). He is editing a book of love poems translated from Greek and Latin, *Eros Englished*, and the *Selected Poems of George Oppen*.

David Bottoms's poems have appeared in such magazines as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, and *The Paris Review*, as well as in numerous anthologies. His first book, *Shooting Rats at the Bibb Country Dump*, won the 1979 Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets. He is also the author of two other poetry collections, *In a U-Haul North of Damascus* and *Under the Vulture-Tree*, and a novel, *Any Cold Jordan*, and is co-editor of *The Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets*. His most recent book is *Easter Weekend* (Houghton Mifflin).

Catherine Bowman's poems have appeared in *Big Wednesday*, *The Best American Poetry 1989*, *River Styx*, and elsewhere. She is a recipient of a 1990 fellowship in poetry from the New York Foundation for the Arts.

Michael Burkard's *My Secret Boat*, a notebook of prose and poems, has just been published by W. W. Norton.

Paul Celan, one of the most important post-war German poets, died in Paris in 1972. His translator **Robert Pinsky**'s book of essays, *Poetry and the World*, was published last year. His most recent book of poems is *The Want Bone* (Ecco Press).

Maxine Chernoff has published seven books of poetry including *Ecstatic Occasions*, *Expedient Forms* (Lehman, MacMillian); and *Cradle and All* (Chester, Faber & Faber). Her novel, *Bop*, was published in 1986. She has published verse and fiction in numerous periodicals including *The Paris Review*, *Partisan Review*, *North American Review*, *Chelsea*, and *Chicago Review*. Her novel, *Plain Grief*, will be published by Simon & Schuster.

Billy Collins has published two books of poetry: *Video Poems* (Applezaboa, 1980) and *The Apple That Astonished Paris* (University of Arizona Press, 1988). He has also published in many periodicals including *The New Yorker*.

Martin Edmunds's poems have appeared in *Under Thirty-five: the New Generation of American Poets* (Anchor-Doubleday, 1989), also in the *Agni Review*, *Padan Arm* and in *Pinchpenny*. Recent work will appear in *Fishdrum* and *Letters*. He lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico

Ian Ganassi's work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Paris Review*, *Mudfish*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Boulevard*, *Pequod*, and *The Black Warrior Review*. He lives in New Haven and works in New York and Connecticut as a business writer.

Suzanne Gardinier's first book is *Usahn: Ten Poems and a Story* (Grand Street Books, 1990). Her poem, "Citizens," is from a book-length work in

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progress called *The New World*. Other excerpts have appeared in *Grand Street*, and will appear in *Ploughshares* in January. Her work has appeared in *Under 35: The New Generation of American Poets*, and in *The Best American Poetry of 1989–90*. She lives in Sag Harbor, New York.

August Kleinzahler's poetry has been published in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The Threepenny Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Ploughshares*, and other periodicals. His first book, *Storm over Hackensack*, won the Bay Area Reviewers Award for Poetry in 1986.

Hilda Morley's most recent book of poetry is *Cloudless at First* (Moyer & Bell, 1988). Her other books include *A Blessing Outside of Us* (Pourboire Press, 1976), *What Are Winds & What Are Waters* (Maitrix Press, 1982), and *To Hold in My Hand: Selected Poems, 1955–1983* (Sheep Meadow Press, 1984). Her poetry has been published in many periodicals including *Harper's*, *Hudson Review*, *New Directions*, and *Sulfur*. She lives in Sag Harbor, New York.

Geoffrey O'Brien is the author of *Dream Time: Chapters from the Sixties* (Viking, 1988), *Hardboiled America* (Van Nostrand Reinhold), and *A Book of Maps* (Red Dust). He contributes critical writing to *The Village Voice* and *The New York Review of Books*.

Linda Pastan has published seven books of poetry including *The Imperfect Paradise*, *A Fraction of Darkness*, *PM/AM New and Selected Poems*. Her eighth book, *Heroes in Disguise*, will be published by Norton in the Fall of 1991.

James Poolos's poetry has been published previously in *The Paris Review*. He has received an MFA from the University of Iowa, and has taught at Kirkwood Community College in Iowa.

Alberto Ríos's collections include *Lime Orchard Woman* and *Five Indiscretions*. He is the recipient of grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, and of the Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets. His book of short stories, *The Iguana Killer*, won the Western States Book Award for Fiction. He teaches at Arizona State.

Len Roberts's last book of poetry, *Black Wings* (Persea Books, 1989), was selected for the National Poetry Series. His previous book, *Sweet Ones*, was published by Milkweed Editions (1987). His work has appeared in *The Georgia Review* and *Poetry*. He is a Guggenheim Fellow in poetry for 1990–91.

Luc Sante's book *Low Lifes*, a study of the New York demimonde at the turn of the century, will be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux this fall.

D.P. Skrief is a graduate of Harvard and Oxford. These are his first published poems.

Arthur Sze's most recent book of poems is *River River* (Lost Roads, 1987). His other collections include *Dazzled*, *Two Ravens*, and *The Willow Wind*. His work has appeared in *Chelsea*, *Harvard Magazine*, and *Manoa*. He lives and works in Santa Fe.

Alexander Thorburn's poems will be published in *Nimrod* and *The Yale Re-*

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view. He was a co-winner of the *Discovery/The Nation* prize in 1986. He lives in Salt Lake City, where he attends the University of Utah's graduate program in literature.

FEATURES

Seymour Lawrence began his publishing career at Harvard where he edited *Wake*, a literary magazine. After serving as the director of the Atlantic Monthly Press, he established an independent imprint in 1965 devoted to quality American fiction. He lives in Connecticut.
Steven Meyer is a graduate student at Yale University, where he is completing a dissertation on Gertrude Stein.

INTERVIEWS

Susannah Hunnewell is on the staff of *The New York Times Magazine*.
Ricardo A. Setti has written for numerous magazines and newspapers in Brazil and is the regional editor in Sao Paolo for *Journal do Brasil*. This interview is a condensed version of a longer interview with Vargas Llosa, published in book form in Spanish, French, and Portuguese.
George Plimpton's newest book is *The Best of Plimpton*.

ART

Peter Halley was born in New York in 1953, and lives in New York. His paintings have been recently exhibited at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo; and Sonnabend Gallery, New York.
Roni Horn was born in New York in 1955, and lives in New York. Her sculpture and drawings have been shown at Galerie Lelong, New York; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; and Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.
Tim Rollins and Kids of Survival are a New York collaborative art group, and have recently exhibited paintings and drawings at the DIA Art Foundation, New York; Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art; and Jay Gorney Modern Art, New York.

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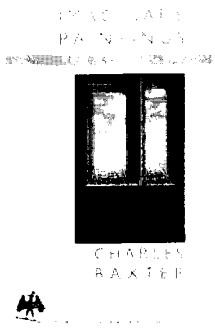
—Cynthia Ozick



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—Jim Harrison

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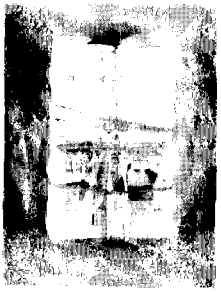

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Calendar of Readings 1990-91

September	17	William Styron reads from his memoir *Darkness Visible*
	23	Wallace Stegner and David Leavitt
	25	Writers-at-Work Live Interview:
		Donald Hall is interviewed by Peter Stitt
	25	Donald Hall and Frank Bidart read from their work
	30	MEXICAN LITERATURE FESTIVAL I
		Homero Aridjis, Marco Antonio Montes de Oca
October	8	MEXICAN LITERATURE FESTIVAL II
		Octavio Paz is interviewed by Alfred MacAdam
	8	Octavio Paz reads from his work
	15	MEXICAN LITERATURE FESTIVAL III
		Elena Poniatowska and poet José Emilio Pacheco
	22	Josephine Jacobsen and Anne Winters
	29	John Edgar Wideman and Terry McMillan
November	5	Claire Bloom: An Evening of Poetry and Music
	12	GEOGRAPHIES I: Barry Lopez reads from his work
	19	Writers-at-Work Live Interview:
		Reynolds Price is interviewed by Frederick Busch
	19	Reynolds Price reads from his work
	26	Don DeLillo and Paul Auster
December		POETS AND PAINTERS:
	3	John Ashbery, Jane Freilicher, Kenneth Koch, Larry Rivers
	10	Robert Creeley, Brice Marden, Jorie Graham, Eric Fischl
	17	John Hollander, Wayne Thiebaud, Mark Strand,
		William Bailey
January	14	John Barth and John Hawkes
	21	August Wilson
	28	WRITERS ON NEW YORK:
		Joyce Johnson, Alfred Kazin and Phillip Lopate
February	4	Doris Lessing
	11	THE TENTH MUSE I: Amy Clampitt introduces
		Julia Budenz, Melissa Green and Kathleen Norris
	25	Norman Mailer reads from his new novel
	27	MEXICAN LITERATURE FESTIVAL IV Carlos Fuentes
March	4	Robert Hass and Daniel Halpern
	11	Amos Oz, Israeli novelist and essayist
	18	Hayden Carruth and Lynne Sharon Schwartz
	25	THE TENTH MUSE II : Galway Kinnell introduces
		Carol Conroy, Toi Derricotte and Li-Young Lee
April	1	GEOGRAPHIES II: Rick Bass and Gretel Ehrlich
	8	Philip Levine and Linda Bierds
	15	Elizabeth Spencer and Kaye Gibbons
	22	Writers-at-Work Live Interview:
		Denise Levertov is interviewed by Deborah Digges
	22	Denise Levertov and Christopher Gilbert read
		from their work
	29	"Discovery"/*The Nation* 1991 Poetry Contest Winners
May	6	Abraham Sutzkever, Preeminent Yiddish poet
	13	Bobbie Ann Mason and Jane Smiley
	21	E.L. Doctorow

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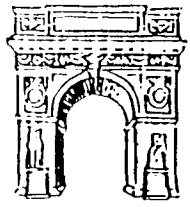

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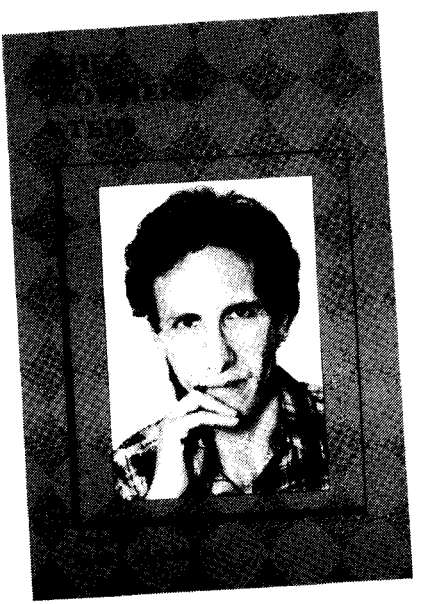

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nothing's the matter
and then, flash of sunlight on a curb,
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